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NORTHERN VIRGINIA RESTORATION INITIATIVE TO EDUCATE ARLINGTON COMMUNITY ON RESTORATION OF VOTING RIGHTS

(Arlington, Virginia, January 5, 2016)— In June of 2015, the McAuliffe administration announced an important reform to the restoration of rights process in Virginia. Outstanding court fines, fees, and restitution will no longer prohibit an individual from having his or her rights restored (This does not remove the financial obligation to pay, but a person's eligibility to have their rights restored is no longer conditioned on unpaid debt). This change is very key in a state that has an estimated 450,000 people who are barred from voting due to a felony conviction. African Americans and other minority groups are disproportionately impacted by this law with 20 percent permanently banned from voting.

The impact of Restoration of Rights in Virginia will be the focus of a panel discussion on January 21, 2016 in Arlington, Virginia and is being sponsored by the Northern Virginia Restoration Initiative (NVRI) and the Northern Virginia Urban League Young Professionals Network (YPN). NVRI organizations include the African American Leadership Council of Arlington, Arm & Arm, CARE Inc., the Nauck Civic Association and the Northern Virginia (NOVA) Coalition.

"For over 100 years, the National Urban League has maintained a focus of ensuring that all citizens have access to the right to vote. Restoring the rights of returning citizens has become an increasingly important issue in recent years. The Northern Virginia Urban League is working to keep this a top policy issue throughout the Commonwealth. As the Director of Personal and Professional Development, I'm excited for our organization to not only support, but also partner with other organizations working in the areas of voting rights and criminal justice reform," states Garrett James, Director of Personal and Professional Development for YPN.

The event, entitled "Restoration of Rights for Returning Citizens looking at Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow," will take place on **Thursday, January 21, 2016 at Drew Model Elementary School and Community Center, 3500 23rd St. S, Arlington, Virginia 22206**. The event will be held from 7pm-9pm and is open to the community. It will feature a keynote address from Kelvin Manurs, Founder of Arm & Arm, an organization that seeks to empower returning citizens; as well as, a panel discussion that will feature experts in the criminal justice system. Panelists include: Gail Arnall, Former Executive Director of OAR; James Younger, Former Deputy Chief of Police for the Arlington County Police Department; Samuel Whittaker, Pastor of Lomax A.M.E Zion Church; and Anthony Wade and Marsha Martin, Returning Citizens.

This event seeks to address one of the collateral consequences of conviction – specific legal restrictions – impacting a persons ability to vote. Collateral consequences can be a returning citizen's most serious punishment, permanently relegating a person to second-class status.

As stated by our keynote speaker Kelvin Manurs: “If my voice will not be heard in a conversation, a situation, an administration or a nation, then I am a whole lot less likely to consider myself a part of those who are involved. But if I am heard, then I feel a part of, and I am much more likely to consider those others in my decision making processes. The healing of our community and nation must include everyone.”

Representatives from the Arlington Public Defenders Office will be present to answer any questions on navigating the legal process.

The African American Leadership Council of Arlington (AALCA) was founded in 2007 as an African-American grass root organization consisting of Civic Association Leaders, the Black Pastors of Arlington, Community Activists, Black Business Leaders, Black Elected Officials and others. We provide a forum for sharing information with the community. For the past several years AALCA has collaborate and partnered with Black Churches in Arlington to sponsor candidates forums and debates for those running for public office.

Arm & Arm's mission is to empower individuals returning home from incarceration with tools that will enable them to make rational evaluations of themselves, their situations, and their circumstances. Then go on to make healthy and proactive decisions, as they navigate their way back into society.

The Community Association of Resources for Education, Enrichment & Economics (CARE), Inc. was established in 1996. CARE, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) community based non-profit organization that provides resources, education and enrichment to disadvantaged individuals and communities.

The Nauck Civic Association works with residents and citizens to make Arlington County and specifically the Nauck area a better community in which to live. Areas of activity may include, but are not limited to, communication, community building and dialogue, transportation, traffic control, public utilities, parks, recreation facilities, police protection, taxation and education.

NOVA Coalition is a non-partisan effort created through a grant awarded by the National Coalition on Black Civic Participation (NCBCP) to register, educate and empower voters in Northern Virginia. The NOVA Coalition is a collaborative of 30+ civic organizations led by the Northern Virginia Urban League and the Virginia Leadership Institute. The Coalition has mounted a regional campaign entitled “NOVA Votes: Educating and Encouraging the Black Vote,” and is working with its member organizations across Northern Virginia to hold voter registration drives, phone banks and get-out-the-vote efforts during the election season.

The Northern Virginia Urban League Young Professionals Network (YPN) is an auxiliary organization of the Northern Virginia Urban League. YPN was founded in 1999 as a way to identify and develop future leaders of the community. Through a variety of programs and community service initiatives, YPN supports the mission of the Northern Virginia Urban League and fosters young professional development, social consciousness and civic involvement.