



Voting Access For All

EMPOWERING MICHIGAN VOTERS



Yes! In Michigan
You Can Vote... even with a felony record

Voting Access For All Coalition responds to the Jan. 9, 2023
opinion piece written by Loren Khogali and Tony Gant

Voting Access For All Coalition (VAAC) is a coalition of individuals and organizations— representing those that may have been impacted by the justice system and the community who feel voting is empowering and important. We also believe our responsibility does not end when the ballots are counted, winners declared, and public servants are sworn in, but extends to holding elected officials accountable to their campaign promises. This includes Supreme Court Justices.

It is our voice and our vote that put those justices on the bench. The courts are tasked with striking the right balance between public safety and individual rights. They make decisions that affect our lives in every aspect for generations to come.

We believe in redemption. We support second look legislation and giving second chances. "Recent events at the Michigan Supreme Court are a reminder of how important it is to have conversations that change hearts and minds." The leadership at VAAC co-signs this statement and is extremely troubled in knowing the reason behind Pete Martel's resignation. Mr. Martel was recently hired as law clerk to Justice Kyra Bolden. After working so hard to rebuild his life, there's no reason why he, someone that has paid their debt to society, should not be allowed to serve as a Law Clerk in the Michigan Supreme Court. Pete Martel earned that right!

Oftentimes, it is not the hurdles of prison that hold us back, it is the lack of opportunities and the unwillingness of society to truly give second chances. Justice Richard Bernstein's original statement was grossly biased, non judicial, and unacceptable. Comments such as these continue to perpetuate stigma against formerly incarcerated individuals. If anything, state supreme courts would benefit from the experience of someone who has seen the criminal legal system from the inside. Most troubling was Justice Bernstein's public admonishment and disrespect of his fellow colleague, Justice Bolden, the first black woman to serve on the Michigan Supreme Court. But rather than speaking with her first, Justice Bernstein went directly to the media. His apology as posted on the Supreme Court website, does not address the negative substance of his statement. His attack on a fellow justice was unprofessional and calls into question his impartiality. Justice Bernstein's comments have caused great harm and his lack of sincere contrition and willingness to repair the harm he has caused is extremely troubling.

We invite Justice Bernstein to speak with our community about the harm caused to individuals and the community by his actions. VAAC leadership has reached out to request a meeting.

Sincerely,

VAAC Leadership