

# Forum details new bill promoting rights of ex-felons

By *Lés Pierres Streater*  
Sentinel-Voice

More than a dozen concerned citizens gathered at a public forum regarding legislation that was passed last month directly affecting ex-felons. The event was held at Nevada Partners last Tuesday, and it was sponsored by PLAN, the Progressive Leadership Alliance of Nevada, along with Teamsters Local 631 and hosted by Nevada State Senator Steven Horsford.

The key points of the new legislation, Senate Bill 282 co-sponsored by Horsford, pertains to ex-offenders and focuses on restoration of voting rights for felons, their ability to serve on a jury and provisions to have certain criminal records sealed, or expunged. In addition, the bill makes provisions for the reduction or abatement of restitution payments in cases where the ex-offender is financially unable to do so.

The bill allows the ex-felon the opportunity, in certain circumstances, to appeal to the courts to have their records wiped clean to make it easier for them to reenter society, get meaningful work and start to be productive, according to event organizers.

Launa Wilson, field organizer for PLAN, a coalition of non-profit organizations that work on various issues of social, political, economic, and racial justice, was co-moderator of the forum. Other speakers included a lawyer and a Teamsters Union representative who helped explain how the bill would work for ex-offenders and how it could affect the community.

Wilson stated, "Our goal was to educate the community about new legislation passed by the legislature this session focused on the restoration of civil rights for ex-felons.

"PLAN has done extensive outreach in informing the public and getting the word out to assist people in having their voting rights restored," Wilson explained.

"We believe that ex-felons that have been dishonorably discharged deserve the right to have their civil rights restored."

"Assembly Bill 55 that passed in the 2003 legislation addressed restoring civil rights to individuals paroled with an honorable discharge. This bill addresses those with dishonorable discharges," Wilson said.

Speaking on the significance of the bill and some of the technical aspects of it, Horsford outlined the following details: "A person who has fulfilled the conditions of his probation and is recommended for discharge by the Division of Parole and Probation may be granted an honorable discharge from probation, especially those individuals suffering from an economic hardship who have demonstrated their fitness for an honorable discharge but have been unable to make restitution as ordered by the court."

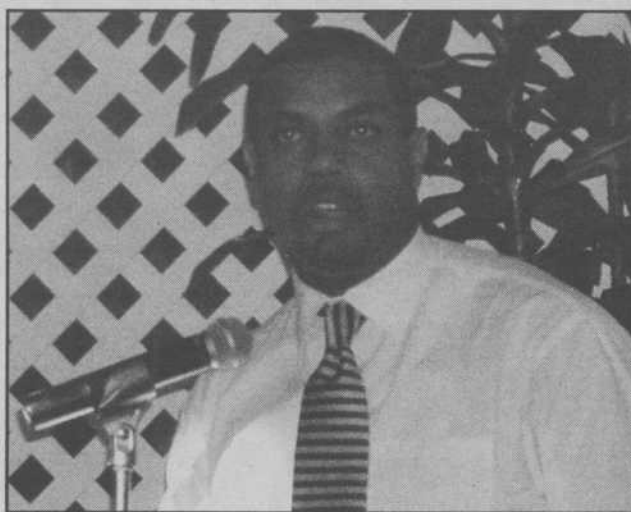
He continued, "A person who has been honorably discharged from probation is free from the terms and conditions of his probation. Additionally, they have immediately restored to them the following civil rights: the right to vote; the right to serve as a juror in a civil action; four years after the date of the honorable discharge they have the right to hold public office; six years after the date of the honorable discharge they can serve as a juror in a criminal action."

Horsford added, "Any person dishonorably discharged from probation or parole before the effective date of this bill, until July 1, 2008, may apply to the Division of Parole and Probation to request that the dishonorable discharge be changed to an honorable discharge."

Horsford spoke on the provisions and restrictions for having records sealed: "The bill allows individuals the right to petition the court to seal their record related to the conviction of a category A or B felony after 15 years from the date of release, category C or D felony after 12 years, category E felony after 7 years, and any gross misdemeanor after 7 years. A person may not petition the court to seal records relating to a conviction of a crime against a child or a sexual offense."

Jerome Lewis, a business agent of Teamsters Local 631 with Republic Services, and the other co-moderator of the forum gave his perspective on the event. He said, "One of the encouraging things about this piece of legislation is that it allows individuals the opportunity to either pay their restitution or have it waived due to some economic hardship..."

Lewis said that this is "something that is held over the heads of ex-felons with dishonorable discharges" and



Sentinel-Voice photo by Lés Pierres Streater

**Nevada State Senator Steven Horsford explains his Senate Bill 282, pertaining to ex-offenders during a public forum held at Nevada Partners last week.**

periences trying to seek employment.

Attorney Edward Miley spoke to the audience about the legal process of having their records expunged by the court: "Essentially an individual will get a certified copy of their criminal record and that is matched up with any felony or misdemeanor to make sure that they are expugnable. You then complete the paperwork that is then submitted to the court and provide a copy to the District Attorney or prosecutor depending if it's the city or the county. They will determine if it meets the statutory criteria or any other requirements, and then make a recommendation to the judge if the record should be expunged or not. If the court grants your motion to expunge, part of the order states that all law enforcement personnel must expunge your record and take it off the NCIC (National Crime Information Center, a nationwide computerized information system), and actually have it say that you were never arrested. You can also ask the court to remove any FBI interrogatory information from your NCIC or FBI record."

Following the presentations by Horsford and Miley, a brief question and answer period followed that consisted largely on ex-felons speaking about their difficulties obtaining and maintaining employment and the lack of social service agencies able to appropriately address this issue.

One ex-felon, Ronald Flenoy, who has successfully used reentry assistance to move in a positive direction after incarceration, spoke about his challenges as it related to his time in prison and what effect it had on him after being paroled and his ex-

showed me that there is no such thing as a free lunch. No work, no pay. If you want to live your life any old kind of way, you will have to pay for it. After a couple of years, I realized that with this ex-felon jacket hanging over my shoulder, I questioned what was I going to do with my life. I knew that I wasn't going back to prison," Flenoy said.

"So, I pursued the opportunity to get my commercial drivers license and Nevada Partners was able to help me pay for my training. I was fresh out of prison with my release papers and I needed to do something better. I wanted to seek employment in the trucking industry," he said.

"At first it was difficult because many of the employers didn't want to hire ex-felons. I sent my résumé here and there. I got a mediocre job with a small company because any check beats a blank check. Eventually, I got on with the Union, Teamsters 631, and after six months being on the out of work list, I got hired with Republic Services. I've been there for the past two years

driving a garbage truck," Flenoy concluded.

Future plans include addressing the issue of social service organizations and the ability to assist ex-offenders with reentry, especially in the area of jobs. At the next forum, employers from around the county will be asked to report on their practices in hiring ex-felons or the lack thereof.

Wilson shared her impression regarding the outcome of the meeting. "Overall this forum was great even though we didn't get the expected turnout that we hoped for."

The event organizers had hoped to attract at least 100, but only had about 15 in attendance. They are hoping to encourage more people to participate and want the community to know that there is help for men and women newly released from prison.

Wilson said, "Our next forum will address the lack of access to employment for ex-felons, why ex-felons have a hard time obtaining employment in this city and this state, years after being released from prison, an issue that was discussed in some detail at this forum."

## REACH 2010

(Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health)

Presents

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August 27, 2005  
8:30 a.m.—3:30 p.m.  
Tuscany Suites  
255 East Flamingo Road

Decreasing Risk Factors for Heart Disease and Stroke in African American Women  
Registration is Required for Attendance

Mistress of Ceremonies

◆ Rikki Cheese—News Anchor, ABC 13 Action News

Speakers

◆ Cedric X. Bryant, Ph.D., FACSM—Chief Exercise Physiologist, American Council on Exercise  
◆ Yvonne Bronner Sc.D.,—Director, Public Health Programs, Morgan State University

Interactive Workshops

Workshop 1 - Nutrition  
Workshop 2 - Stress  
Workshop 3 - Fitting Fitness In  
Workshop 4 - Yoga  
Workshop 5 - Spice Is Nice  
Workshop 6 - Line Dance  
Workshop 7 - Strategies for a Successful Exercise Plan

The Southern Nevada Black Nurses Association will provide blood pressure screenings.

Call 940-5423 for more conference information

A Collaborative effort of: University of Nevada Cooperative Extension, Southern Nevada Black Nurses Association, Southern Nevada Coalition of Concerned Women, and Delta Sigma Theta Sorority

Persons in need of special accommodations or assistance must call or notify the Healthy Hearts Project at 702-940-5429 at least three days prior to the above scheduled events.

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