



June 4, 2021

The Honorable Robert M. "Bobby" Dyer  
And Members of City Council  
City of Virginia Beach

Dear Mayor Dyer and City Council Members:

Virginia Beach Vision strongly endorses the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the rights of all racial minorities and the rights of all persons regardless of their religion, national origin, gender, or marital choices to hold public offices whether elected or by appointment. Diversity on City Council and on its Boards and Commissions makes us a stronger community. We are proud of the finding of the U.S. Census Bureau's Race Disparity Index that Virginia Beach is among the most integrated cities in the entire Country.

The Virginia Beach Vision Board of Directors supports the decision of the Virginia Beach City Council to appeal the Court's March 31, 2021 opinion in the case of Holloway v. City of Virginia Beach, et. al.

Pending changes to the existing voting system will affect all future elections and are among the most important issues our organization has considered. A special Task Force was formed to review the public briefing given to City Council on this topic on May 11<sup>th</sup>, to be briefed by members of the Virginia Bar and the City Attorney's office and to review the Court's opinion in the Holloway case.

Of note, we found that when the Voting Rights Act was adopted by Congress in 1965, the Virginia Beach voting system was challenged and upheld by the United States Supreme Court in 1967. The Virginia Beach voting system was again challenged in 1997 and the U. S. District Court found that the Virginia Beach system did not violate Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Further, every 10 years when the census data is compiled, the city adjusts the district boundaries to ensure the districts have an equal number of voters. Each of those boundary adjustments is submitted to the Justice Department for review.

In addition to the Holloway Case, Virginia Beach Vision is also aware of the legislation adopted by the 2021 General Assembly mandating a new voting system for the City of Virginia Beach. That legislation was adopted despite concerns expressed by City Council and without the voters' knowledge or input. Consequently, the citizens of Virginia Beach will be restricted in the manner and number of elected City Council and City School Board representatives for whom they will vote.

This legislative action was unprecedented and contrary to prior actions of the General Assembly that required the city to hold an Advisory Referendum in 1996 when the City Council previously considered changing the City's voting system. The citizens of Virginia Beach are largely unaware of the proposed change in the City's voting system and the differences between what is proposed and the system that has been in place for decades. Consequently, Virginia Beach Vision recommends that the city use all available resources at its disposal to educate the public about

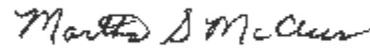
the differences between our existing voting system and that mandated by the General Assembly and that a voters' referendum again be held. While City Council may need, on an interim basis, to begin drawing new boundaries to address the General Assembly's mandate, we further recommend that any such maps be circulated to the public for input and deliberation.

We thank City Council for your leadership and your consideration in this matter.

Respectfully,



Ann K. Crenshaw  
President



Martha S. McClees  
Executive Director