

**TESTIMONY OF SHERI IACHETTA
GENERAL REGISTRAR,
CITY OF CHARLOTTESVILLE – CHARLOTTESVILLE, VIRGINIA
SEPTEMBER 25, 2008**

Committee Members:

Good Morning. Thank you for the opportunity to talk about “Ensuring the Rights of College Students to Vote.”

I am the General Registrar of an independent City in the Commonwealth of Virginia that is home to one of the State’s largest Universities and the home of one of our Founding Fathers, Thomas Jefferson. During the 10 years I have served in this office, the issue of student registration has come up time and time again. My long standing policy has been to accept at face value what the voter has written and signed on their registration form. The statement to which they sign their name says, “*I swear/affirm, under felony penalty for making willfully false material statements or entries, that I am a US citizen and a resident of Virginia, the information I have provided on this form is true.....*” I don’t believe I have reasonable cause to question the statement of a voter simply because of the fact they are part of a particular group. To do so would create a special class of voter and as you are aware, Virginia falls under Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act of 1965; any attempt to create a special class of voters would run afoul of this act.

One of the recurring themes we hear is that students have more than one residence. They have a residence in the dormitory as well as a possible second residence (their family home) which may or may not be in the same state as their college. Some of my colleagues are not comfortable registering a student with a dormitory address. Dorms may be the more traditional dwelling; however, some students have apartments off campus. Since all voters must be treated in the same manner, our inability to identify a voter’s situation based simply on address precludes this office from holding all students to the same standard. We also have a significant number of residents we term “snowbirds” who have a residence here for part of the year and in a warmer climate for the remainder of the year. They have a nearly identical housing situation as students and need to determine their legal voting residence just as students must.

A second issue that arises is whether students have the expressed *intent* to remain at their address indefinitely. Determining a voter’s future intent is beyond the purview of this office. Due to the presence of the University of Virginia, there are any number of transient professionals who may not have the expressed intent to remain at their Charlottesville address indefinitely—doctors in residence, visiting professors. There has been no call to preclude these individuals from registering to vote. Again, to determine the intent of any other member of the general population is beyond the scope of local resources.

A third issue raised regarding the registration of students is whether they have a vested interest in the operation of local government. To this, I would answer that students are regular and frequent users of City resources including roads, emergency services, and police resources. They are a

valuable source of volunteers to any number of community-based programs. They are directly affected by local ordinances regarding use of bicycles, noise controls, trash collection and more. I use University of Virginia students in this office – as Election Officials and as staff interns. Students are a significant source of fiscal resources in this community, not only for the tax dollars that they bring in, but because they are included in the census count of local population, therefore significant federal tax dollars are allotted to this locality based on their presence. If their federal taxation dollars are awarded locally then their representation should also be local.

In summary students are an integral part of this community and in my opinion should be afforded the same voter registration opportunity of any other citizen residing in the Commonwealth. I hope to continue to work with the Virginia General Assembly to make the laws more definitive and equitable as they relate to students and other voters in similar circumstances.

Respectfully submitted,

Sheri Iachetta
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City of Charlottesville