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Hayden, et al. v. Pataki
Press Conference
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REMARKS BY LUMUMBA AKINWOLE-BANDELE
“FREE THE VOTE”

My name is Lumumba Akinwole-Bandele, I am a father, husband, resident and community activist in Bedford Stuyvesant. Despite the beauty and rich legacy of Bed Stuy, my home is a place where families struggle to ensure access to the things most neighborhoods enjoy as a right. Our homes are being bought out and taken over, our public schools have yet to become a place for developing educational growth, indigenous businesses are not given opportunities for growth and establishment.

Of the population currently denied the right to vote African Americans and Latinos collectively make up 87% of that population. For example, African Americans make up less than 16% of New York State's overall population but make up over 54% of the current prison population and 50% of the parolee population.

By observation alone one can see that young people make up the majority of those being imprisoned. The disproportionate funds being designated to punitive programs rather than educational and recreational programs set the stage for an unending relationship with the criminal justice system. While the recent victory of the No More Youth Jail Beds campaign that blocked the building of two youth jails is a major asset in the fight for human dignity, we recognize that young people continue to be victimized by the many levels of the criminal justice system.

The heavy police presence in our community, under the guise of the “War on Drugs,” has done nothing more than incarcerated record numbers of Black and Latino youth, made stops and frisks a daily routine and provided more job opportunities to small prison towns in upstate New York.

These statistics translate into harsh realities for Black and Latino communities. These policies allow institutions to get away with inadequate health care, police misconduct, high unemployment, unaffordable housing for the poor, failing schools, and unaccountable elected officials.

Institutions directly responsible for these issues and policies that create these issues know that they do not have to fear any political outcry in the polls. At the same time, our communities are victimized by these issues and are forced to watch a sizable population

of our family, neighbors and friends be stripped of their right to vote, while those of us who remain continue to attempt to grasp a hold of political power and institutions that can change these harsh realities.

Young people throughout NY, from Bedford Stuyvesant to the South Bronx, to Buffalo will not continue to be marginalized.

Free The Vote.