

CITIZEN GROUP GATHERS 15,000 SIGNATURES -- MEETS 1st DEADLINE TO PUT NEW 'GENDER ID' ACT ON BALLOT

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
February 5, 2008

Contact: Michelle Turner
(301) 301-339-4864

Montgomery County, MD – “It is with delight that we presented to the Board of Elections yesterday the signatures of over 15,000 Montgomery County registered voters who want to be able to directly vote on the new ‘gender identity’ bill,” said Dr. Ruth Jacobs, president of the newly formed group, Maryland Citizens for a Responsible Government.

The group was required to collect at least 12,500 valid signatures by February 4 as a first step in getting the issue before the voters next November. “We encountered the long delay of having our petition approved by the County Council, getting organized, running into Christmas and other holidays, and days of bad weather, but we made the deadline. We believe that is an indication of the intensity of voter outrage,” stated Jacobs.

The ‘gender identity’ bill would add ‘gender identity’ as a protected class to the County’s non-discrimination code. It covers the areas of housing, lending, employment, taxi and cable services and public accommodations and their facilities. It was passed by the Council and signed into law by County Executive Isiah Leggett last November.

As defined by the new legislation, ‘gender identity’ is "an individual's actual or perceived gender, including a person's gender-related appearance, expression, image, identity, or behavior, whether or not those gender-related characteristics differ from the characteristics customarily associated with the person's assigned sex at birth."

The group believes that the bill engenders very little popular support once its details become known, especially its lack of protection for women using the restrooms, shower rooms, and locker facilities in health clubs, community swimming pools, malls, department stores and any other area of public accommodation. “Adding wordage to the bill specifically exempting these private areas would have the responsible thing to do,” according to Jacobs.

MCRG also points to the overwhelming opposition the bill engendered last November after a series of articles and radio ads exposing the bill ran. Several of MCRG’s volunteers reviewed the emails, letters, and telephone calls received by the Council’s office and discovered that out of the 2,883 communications received, 2,424 opposed the bill, with only 459 supporting it. The Council tallied comments such as “Do not pass this outrageous bill” and “I have been really racking my brains trying to understand the purpose and reasoning for the council vote on the transgender Bill 23-07 . Please help me understand,” as uncommitted.

The group is also suspicious of the out-of-state campaign contributions made to first term councilmember Duchy Trachtenberg who sponsored the bill and made it her legislative priority. “About \$400,000 was contributed to Ms. Trachtenberg’s campaign coffer, most of it coming from outside the County. About 63% of her contributions came from residents of other states, with the bulk coming California and New York. We wonder just whose interests she is representing,” according to Jacobs.

“The Council failed the voters of the County, and we seek to put the bill’s future up to the County voters,” said Jacobs.

The next milestone the group faces comes on February 18, when it must present the Board of Elections with another valid 12,500 signatures. The 25,000 signature requirement totals 5% of the registered voters of Montgomery County. The group’s small army of over a hundred volunteers will be out in force over the next two weeks, according to Jacobs.

MCRG was formed last December in response to the bill’s passage. The group vows to continue its opposition until the bill is amended or repealed. Information about the group and the petition drive may be found at www.notmyshower.net

#####