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**COUNCILWOMAN CHARLES, DEPUTY MAYOR LEON, COUNCILWOMAN HUNTER
AND MAYOR JACKSON DEMAND JUSTICE DEPARTMENT INVESTIGATION
INTO RAMAPO WARD SCHEME**

Current & Former Minority Elected Officials: Ward Referendum on 9/30 Would End
27-Year Black Representation on Town Board

NEW CITY (September 23, 2014)- Leading African-American and Haitian-American elected officials are demanding the Justice Department investigate the proposed ward referendum in Ramapo because it would violate the Voting Rights Act by risking the black community's 27 years of uninterrupted representation on the Town Board.

Town voters will decide on the plan next week in a September 30th referendum. Currently, members of the Board are elected townwide. The referendum would split the town into district and the leaders are urging a NO vote.

"Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me," said Councilwoman Charles, a longtime civil rights and Spring Valley neighborhood watch activist whose father-in-law, Bernard Charles, Sr. was the town's first-ever African-American councilman when he was elected in 1967.

"In 2003 and 2011, the Rockland Legislature drew so-called minority districts for Spring Valley and Hillcrest after complaints from civil rights groups. But both districts elected white men, not minorities," Charles said, "Don't make me promises when I know my history. The Justice Department must intervene immediately."

Charles, Spring Valley Deputy Mayor Anthony Leon, former Ramapo Deputy Supervisor Fran Hunter and former Hillburn Mayor Bernard Jackson demanded the investigation in a letter to Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights Molly Moran and Chris Herren, Voting Section Chief in the Civil Rights Bureau of the Department of Justice. A copy of the letter is attached.

"Minority voters shouldn't pay the price for the battle between Preserve Ramapo and the Orthodox and Hasidic communities. It is impossible to draw a district that is certain to elect a minority and our diverse town should not have an all-white Town Board. This is a violation of the Voting Rights Act and I demand the Department of Justice investigate," she said.

African-Americans, Haitian-Americans and Jamaican-Americans comprise only 15.9% of Ramapo's population, but a minority representative has held 25% of the voting power on the town council (1 out of 4 votes) continually since 1987. African-Americans occupy influential positions in Ramapo town government, including the Town Clerk's office and the Chairwoman of Zoning Board of Appeals. The ward system would create a 6-

member board. At best, there would be one majority Afro-American/Latino district, reducing minority representation from 25% to 16.6%. At worst, there would be no minority representation at all.

The ward plan violates the Voting Rights Act because minority voters are geographically concentrated in the Spring Valley and Hillcrest areas and would be packed into one district in order to create minority district. But an analysis prepared by the research firm GeoPolitical Strategies shows that even such a district would contain less than 50% black voters.

GeoPolitical Strategies was hired by Democrats and Republicans to advise the Rockland County Legislature on districting issues.

A ward system would pit African-Americans against Haitian-Americans against Latino-Americans in a single district, allowing a white candidate to steal the seat. It happened in both 2003 and 2011 when Haitian-American candidates for the Rockland Legislature were defeated by white male candidates in districts set aside for minorities.

“The truth has come out with the Republicans endorsing this ward scheme. Republicans across America are trying to stop our community from voting, so it’s no surprise they are doing the same thing in Ramapo,” Charles said.

7 of the Town’s 12 Village Boards are all white. None of them are considering shifting to a ward system to increase diversity.