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## **Louisa felon illegally registered after receiving form from Voter Participation Center**

Mark Bowes

Jul 26, 2012

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# Voter Registration Application

Form 100

1. Are you a United States Citizen?  Yes  No  
2. Are you at least 18 years old as of before election day?  Yes  No  
3. If you checked "Yes" to question 1 or 2, answer the following questions on this application form.  
4. Please print your name in full (last, first, middle initial) in the space provided.

1. First Name A. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female	Last Name Nicholson	First Name Bonnie	Middle Name H	County Arlington
2. Home Address [Redacted]	City or town Louisa	State VA	Zip Code 23093	
3. Address where you feel your mail should be delivered (leave blank if none)	City or town	State	Zip Code	
4. Date of Birth [Redacted]	5. Telephone Number (optional) [Redacted]	6. Signature (Print name if you cannot sign) [Redacted]		
7. District of Party (Check one for all subsequent elections)	8. Name of District, County, or precinct in which you are registered [Redacted]	9. [Redacted]		

10. I have reviewed my state's laws, rules and regulations that:  
a. I am a United States citizen  
b. I meet the eligibility requirements of my state and jurisdiction to register to vote  
c. The information I have provided is true to the best of my knowledge under penalty of perjury. If I have provided false information, I may be fined, imprisoned, or (if not a U.S. citizen) detained from or refused entry to the United States.

Signature: *Bonnie Jean Nicholson*  
Date: 2/28/08  
Month Day Year

State Sen. Thomas A. Garrett Jr., R-Louisa, produced a copy of Bonnie Nicholson's original registration form.

Mark Bowes

**A** felon living in Louisa County registered to vote illegally and then cast a ballot in the 2008 presidential election after filling out and submitting a voter-registration form she received by mail from the Voter Participation Center, a state senator who prosecuted the case confirmed Wednesday.

The case is the first known instance of voter fraud that resulted from voter registration mailings by the Voter Participation Center, a nonprofit that has distributed 5 million third-party registration forms across the country and nearly 200,000 in Virginia this year targeting Democrat-leaning voting blocs, such as unmarried women, young people and minorities.

State election officials and local registrars say hundreds, if not thousands, of the forms have been sent to ineligible voters, including dead relatives, children, non-U.S. citizens, already registered voters, and pets. The voting group, which has ties to progressive organizations, fills in the documents with the names and addresses of the people they are trying to reach.



In 2010, then Louisa County Commonwealth's Attorney Thomas A. Garrett Jr. — now a state senator — prosecuted Bonnie Nicholson, 57, on felony charges of illegally registering to vote and unlawfully casting a ballot in the 2008 general election.

Authorities determined that Nicholson, who had been convicted of a felony in 1980, received a national voter registration form in a mailing from the Voter Participation Center and signed it on Feb. 28, 2008. Despite her felony conviction, Nicholson swore that she had reviewed her state's registration instructions and met the eligibility requirements.

Her name and address were already printed on the form.

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On Wednesday, Garrett provided the Richmond Times-Dispatch with a copy of Nicholson's registration form, which bears the name of the Voter Participation Center and a post office box in Boston. Louisa Registrar Cristy E. Watkins confirmed the document's authenticity when contacted by phone.

The form shows that the Louisa registrar's office removed Nicholson from its voting rolls on May 26, 2009, because of her previously undisclosed felony conviction.

In January 2010, Nicholson pleaded guilty to two counts of election fraud and was sentenced to 10 years in prison with all time suspended.

Page Gardner, president and chief executive officer of the Voter Participation Center, has discounted any suggestion that voter fraud can occur through the organization's mailings, though she acknowledged its system isn't perfect. The group compares lists of existing registered voters it acquires with names on commercial databases provided by data vendors.

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"I don't know of this incident at all," Gardner said Wednesday. "I know (Garrett) has alleged it in the past. A person who wants to commit a felony by falsely filling out a form can get any form from a DMV office, off the state website — so I don't know where this person got the form, I don't know why this person filled it out."

Gardner said VPC relies on the "diligence of local election officials" to review the submitted applications, as well as on the "individual integrity of the individuals receiving the forms."

Garrett said Gardner is in denial if she believes that voter fraud can't occur.

"She can say ... 'We don't know where (the felon) got it' all she wants to," he said. "But I do know where she got it from and it was from (Gardner's) organization, and I got the proof. I produced the original form, which is on file and accessible to the public."

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Garrett said he believes Nicholson and another felon he prosecuted for illegally registering to vote were essentially duped into breaking the law.

"They knew they weren't supposed to do it," Garrett said. "But when people start soliciting you to do it, it's almost like an entrapment sort of thing. I believe sincerely that if people hadn't solicited them to register, they wouldn't have done it."

Garrett said that, had both felons petitioned the governor to have their voting rights restored, "they likely would have gotten it."

"What we were trying to do was send a message that we do in fact uphold and enforce the laws ... and there will be consequences for not obeying the laws," Garrett said.

"People who may have made a mistake years ago — who would like to participate in the democratic process — I would encourage them to apply for rights restoration. But play by the rules."

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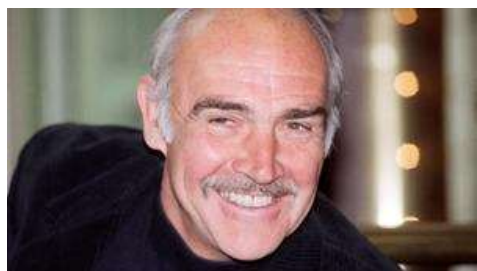
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