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News Release

Polling officials allowed 17-year-old to vote Teenager now facing felony charges

Eden Prairie, Minn. – October 10, 2006: Calling it the biggest thing he has ever done in his entire life, Jesse L. Hunter voted in the Minnesota primaries on Sept. 12. However, Hunter is unlike other voters casting their ballots this year. He is only 17 years old.

"They [polling officials] examined my driver's license and asked for my social security number," Hunter said, "but they never seemed to notice that I wrote '1989' as the year of my birth. I voted, and walked out euphoric, bearing an 'I Voted' sticker upon my forehead."

Hunter tells fellow members at the National Youth Rights Association (NYRA) that he never intended to actually vote, but wanted to spark a conversation on the voting age. He considers the current voting age to be unfair to those under the age of 18. "I learned about the importance of voting from my high school government teacher," he said.

Hunter's mother broke down in tears after receiving a phone call from the district attorney's office informing her that her son will be charged with voting fraud, a class one felony in the state of Minnesota. According to the Minnesota Sentencing Guidelines Commission, a judge is allowed to give a sentence of up to 12 months in jail or other non-jail sanctions as conditions of probation for someone with no criminal history.

"Many adults take the right to vote for granted: more than 80 million eligible adults failed to vote in the 'high turnout' 2004 election," said Alex Koroknay-Palicz, NYRA's Executive Director. "Yet for exercising the central civil right in this country, Jesse is being charged with a felony."

"If Jesse was a year older, he would be applauded for doing his civic duty, but instead, he is being charged with a crime," said Adam King, NYRA's Vice President. "Jesse had the courage to stand up for what is right - for democracy - and he could go to jail for doing so."

About NYRA:

Founded in 1998, NYRA is the largest youth rights organization in the country. Based in the Washington, D.C. area, the organization is committed to fighting for increased rights of young people. NYRA has nearly 7,000 members nationwide.

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