



**HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION
CITY OF NORTHAMPTON
OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
210 Main Street – Room 12
Northampton MA 01060-3199
413-587-1249; FAX: 413-587-1275
mayor@northamptonma.gov**

Heather J. Johnson
Chair

Carol Rinehart
Vice Chair

Mia Kim Sullivan
Secretary

Wendy Berg
Syed Z. Iqbal
L'Tanya Robinson
Linda Stone
Rev. Dr. Michael Stotts
Sara Weinberger

February 2, 2009

District Attorney Elizabeth D. Scheibel
Northwestern District Office
One Gleason Plaza
Northampton, MA 01060

Dear District Attorney Scheibel,

On behalf of Northampton Human Rights Commission, we are writing to express our concern about the well-publicized case of Jason W. Vassell and to urge your office to demonstrate that there has been no racial bias or discrimination in the prosecution of this case. It is important to our community that we know our District Attorney's Office has made every effort to ensure that racial bias and discrimination have not been factors in the judicial process.

Given evidence-based reports that the men who attacked Mr. Vassell have a history of racially motivated violence, and that Mr. Vassell appears to have had good reason to act in self defense, it appears that an injustice may have been done. We are concerned that an African-American student with no prior criminal record or relationship with his attackers has been charged with serious offenses while the two white men who apparently initiated the attack have been charged with a minor offense in one case and none at all in the other.

Out of concern for the human rights of Mr. Jason W. Vassell, we ask you to investigate whether there has been racial bias and/or a civil rights violation on the part of the criminal justice system and, if so, to immediately address that injustice.

Thank you for your attention to this human rights matter.

Sincerely,

Heather J. Johnson, Chair

Carol Rinehart, Vice-Chair

The Rev. Dr. Michael R. Stotts

