



## Support Access to the Ballot Box for People with Felony Convictions Who Have Completed Their Sentences

Currently Tennessee prevents people from voting if they have been convicted of a felony and are incarcerated, on parole, on probation, or not up to date on child support payments or court-ordered restitution and court costs. Imposing financial obligations on the right to vote creates a modern-day poll tax.

**It's time to change the law to ensure that people can regain their right to vote upon completion of their sentence.** Removing the financial burden currently imposed on the right to vote will ensure that a person's ability to have a voice in our democracy is not tied to his or her financial status.

**An extremely large number of people have no voice in our democracy.** Nationwide, an estimated 6.1 million people are denied the right to vote because of laws that restrict voting for people who have a felony conviction.<sup>i</sup> Under these policies, over 420,000 Tennesseans, or approximately one out of every twelve voting-age people, are disenfranchised.<sup>ii</sup>

**The majority of people denied the right to vote nationwide are no longer incarcerated.** Three quarters of disenfranchised Tennesseans have completed their sentences yet are still unable to vote due to Tennessee's burdensome process for restoring the right to vote.<sup>iii</sup>

**The disproportionate impact of felony disenfranchisement on the African-American community is profound.** Many of the laws that deprive the right to vote stem from Jim Crow era efforts to disenfranchise African-Americans and they have been devastatingly effective. More than a third of the 6.1 million people disenfranchised nationwide are Black. Nationally, this adds up to more than seven percent of the adult African-American population being disenfranchised, compared to less than two percent of non-African-Americans.<sup>iv</sup> In Tennessee, a shocking 21 percent of Black people – more than one in five – are disenfranchised.<sup>v</sup>

**Tying the right to vote to income is unfair.** Many people find it difficult to meet the financial hurdles they must overcome to get their right to vote back, which is compounded by the difficulty people with records face when seeking employment. Imposing a financial requirement on the right to vote creates a modern-day poll tax and punishes people who are trying to get their lives back on track for being poor.

**Tennessee's disenfranchisement laws are among the most complicated and onerous in the country.** In Tennessee, once financial hurdles are met, the process for restoring the right to vote is convoluted and challenging in and of itself, requiring a person to make a significant investment of time to track down numerous government officials in different locations and get them to sign off on a certificate of restoration prior to actually registering to vote. There is no set time frame within which these various government agencies must act, and a 2008 ACLU of Tennessee survey found that most election officials themselves did not know or understand Tennessee's law governing the restoration process.<sup>vi</sup> It is so difficult to restore voting rights that between 1990 and 2015, only 11,581 people managed to do it.<sup>vii</sup>

**Supporting voter restoration is good for public safety.** Voting is a powerful symbol of being part of our democracy. Restoring the right to vote is critical for individuals to reintegrate into society, bringing electoral power back to marginalized communities.

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<sup>i</sup> Uggen, Christopher, et al. "6 Million Lost Voters: State-Level Estimates of Felony Disenfranchisement, 2016." *The Sentencing Project*, The Sentencing Project, 6 Oct. 2016, <http://www.sentencingproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/6-Million-Lost-Voters.pdf>. Retrieved August 24, 2017.

<sup>ii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>iii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>iv</sup> Ibid.

<sup>v</sup> Ibid.

<sup>vi</sup> ACLU of Tennessee. "Addressing Barriers to the Ballot Box: Registering to Vote in Tennessee with a Past Felony Conviction, 2008." <http://www.aclu-tn.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/FinalRTVSurvey1.pdf>. Retrieved August 24, 2017.

<sup>vii</sup> Uggen et al.