

[2017 Session] Restore Voting Rights to People on Parole and/or Community Supervision After Ten Years

Policy Background:

After someone receives a felony offense in Texas, voting rights cannot be restored until he or she has fully completed parole and/or community supervision, a process that can take decades.

But restoring voting rights to formerly incarcerated individuals can positively contribute to their rehabilitation process, providing them an additional tool to become productive and engaged members of society. Voting fosters the creation of social ties and is part of identity formation, signaling formal membership within the political community and granting status to its participants.¹ Research supports that when formerly incarcerated populations are able to successfully reenter society, they are less likely to recidivate, thus increasing public safety.

Texas policy-makers should restore voting rights to individuals on parole and/or community supervision after 10 years. Voting is a simple yet effective way for formerly incarcerated people to become and remain positively involved in their communities.

Key Facts:

- Collateral consequences that result from a felony conviction – including loss of voting rights – function as an obstacle to achieving and maintaining stability within a community. Data indicate that states that disenfranchise felons experience significantly higher rates of repeat offenses than states that do not.²
- No evidence suggests that withholding the right to vote deters crime.³ In fact, withholding voting rights may impede a person's rehabilitation by increasing feelings of alienation, stigmatization, and humiliation.⁴ Research suggests that democratic participation is positively associated with a reduction in recidivism.⁵
- However, many Texans do not have the opportunity to vote:
 - 495,928 Texans were barred from voting as of October 2016.⁶

- Approximately 2.5% of voting-age Texans – 1 in every 40 adults – cannot vote due to a criminal conviction.⁷
- Of that population, nearly 112,000 Texans are unable to vote while serving time on parole.⁸
- More than 8,000 Texans have been on parole for more than 10 years.⁹
- Loss of voting rights disproportionately impacts African Americans and Latinos due to disparities within the criminal justice system. In Texas, 6.2% of African Americans are disenfranchised.¹⁰

Relevant Bills:

- **Bill Number:** [HB 1307](#) [Senfronia Thompson]
Bill Caption: Relating to qualifications and registration of certain voters on probation.
TCJE Materials: [Fact Sheet](#)
- **Bill Number:** [HB 2676](#) [Senfronia Thompson]
Bill Caption: Relating to the restoration of rights to certain persons convicted of a felony offense.

Other Bills Related to Restoration of Rights:

- **Bill Number:** [HB 152](#) [Dutton]
Bill Caption: Relating to the restoration of certain rights to a criminal defendant.
House Hearing Notice: [Criminal Jurisprudence, March 27, 2017](#)
- **Bill Number:** [HB 190](#) [Dutton]
Bill Caption: Relating to qualifications and registration of certain voters on parole or mandatory supervision.

¹ J. A. Siegel, “Felon Disenfranchisement and the Fight for Universal Suffrage,” *Social Work* 56, no. 1 (2011): 89-91.

² Guy Padraic Hamilton-Smith and Matthew Vogel, “The Ballot as a Bulwark: The Impact of Felony Disenfranchisement on Recidivism,” *SSRN Electronic Journal*, August 2011.

³ Molly Smith, “Felons Face Difficulties in Regaining Voting Rights,” *Reporting Texas*, November 3, 2016.

⁴ J. A. Siegel, *Felon Disenfranchisement*.

⁵ Guy Padraic Hamilton-Smith and Matthew Vogel, *The Ballot as a Bulwark*.

⁶ Christopher Uggen, Ryan Larson, and Sarah Shannon, “6 Million Lost Voters: State-Level Estimates of Felony Disenfranchisement, 2016,” *The Sentencing Project*, 2016, pp. 1-17.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Data request submitted by Representative Senfronia Thompson to the Texas Department of Criminal Justice; data received April 6, 2017.

¹⁰ The Sentencing Project, *THE FACTS: State-by-State Data*, 2016.