



WASHINGTON BUREAU · NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF COLORED PEOPLE
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ACTION ALERT

DATE: July 28, 2009
TO: Concerned Parties
FROM: Hilary O. Shelton, Director, Washington Bureau

NAACP Supports Voter Re-enfranchisement for Ex-Felony Offenders

THE “DEMOCRACY RESTORATION ACT” WOULD CLEAR A PATH TO ALLOW EX-FELONY OFFENDERS TO VOTE IN FEDERAL ELECTIONS ONCE THEY ARE OUT OF PRISON

THE ISSUE:

Almost 4 million Americans, or 1 in 50 American adults, are not allowed to vote because they have been convicted of a felony, regardless of the nature or seriousness of the offense. Three fourths of these Americans are no longer in jail. As such, **13% of African American males – 1.4 million – are prohibited from voting.**

Furthermore, state laws vary when it comes to defining which felony offenses are disenfranchising offenses and in determining how and if people who are no longer incarcerated can regain their right to vote. Thus it is possible that in some states a person can functionally lose their right to vote forever if he or she writes one bad check. Furthermore, the process to regain one’s right to vote in any state is often difficult and cumbersome. Most states require specific gubernatorial action, and in 16 states federal ex-felons need a presidential pardon to regain their voting rights.

The “war on drugs” has had a disproportionate impact on African Americans; between 1985 and 1995, there was a 707% increase in the number of African Americans in state prison for a drug offense, compared to a 306% increase for whites over the same period. Thus African Americans are disproportionately losing their right to vote, and having greater difficulty in reclaiming it, even after they have paid their debt to society.

Because voting is such an integral part of being a productive member of American society, the NAACP has worked closely with other like-minded groups to develop legislation that would allow felons who are no longer incarcerated to reintegrate themselves into society and vote in federal elections. Congressman John Conyers (MI) and Senator Russ Feingold (WI) have reintroduced the “*Democracy Restoration Act*” (H.R. 3335 / S. 1516) re-enfranchising ex-felony offenders once they are released from prison. Furthermore, re-enfranchisement for rehabilitated felony offenders may be part of the continuing election reform package also to be considered later in the 111th Congress

More...

MEMBERSHIP IS POWER! JOIN THE NAACP TODAY.

For more information, call your local NAACP branch or visit www.naacp.org

THE ACTION WE NEED YOU TO TAKE:

Call, fax, write or e-mail your Representative and BOTH your Senators and **URGE THEM TO CO-SPONSOR H.R. 3335 / S. 1516, THE “DEMOCRACY RESTORATION ACT”**. To contact your elected federal representatives, you may:

✓ **Make a Phone Call:**

Call your Senator and your Representative in Washington by dialing the Capitol Switchboard and asking to be transferred to your Senator/Congressman’s office. The switchboard phone number is **(202) 224-3121** (see message section, below).

✓ **Write a Letter**

To write a letter to your senator, send it to:

The Honorable (name of Senator)
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

To write a letter to your Representative, send it to:

The Honorable (name of Representative)
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

✓ **Send a Fax**

If you would like to send a fax, call your Senator or Representative’s office (through the Capitol switchboard) and ask for his/her fax number (you can use either the attached sample letter or the message box, below).

✓ **Send an E-Mail**

To send an e-mail to your senator, simply go to www.senate.gov, click on Senators, then click on Contacting Senators (by name or by state). This selection will also help you to identify who your two senators are.

To send an e-mail to your Representative, go to www.house.gov, and click on “write your representative.” This will help you identify who your congressman is and how to contact him/her.

Unfortunately, not all Members of Congress have e-mail addresses.

THE MESSAGE:

- ◆ Felony voting disenfranchisement laws currently disqualify almost 4 million Americans, or 1 in every 50 adult American.
- ◆ The “war on drugs” has resulted in a disproportionate number of African Americans, specifically African American men, being convicted of felony offenses. As a result, 13%, or 1.4 million, of African American males are prohibited from voting.
- ◆ Because the definition of a felony varies from state to state, as do felony disenfranchisement laws, there is a vast disparity in which ex-offenders may vote, based on where they live. In some states, writing one bad check may result in you losing your voting privileges for life!
- ◆ Felony voting restrictions are the last vestige of voting prohibitions; when the U.S. was founded only wealthy white men were allowed to vote. Women, minorities, illiterates and the poor were excluded. These restrictions have all been eliminated over time, often with much debate and rancor. People who have served their time and been released from prison are the last Americans to be denied their basic right to vote.
- ◆ With voting such an integral part of becoming a productive member of American society, we should be encouraging ex-felons to vote, not prohibiting them.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION TO THIS IMPORTANT MATTER!!!

If you have any questions, call Hilary Shelton at the Washington Bureau at (202) 463-2940.

(date)

Sample Letter

The Honorable _____
U.S. House of Representatives / U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20515 / 20510

RE: RE-ENFRANCHISEMENT OF REHABILITATED EX-FELONY OFFENDERS

Dear Congressman / Senator _____;

I am writing to let you know of my strong support for allowing ex-felony offenders, men and women who have served their time and paid their debt to society, to regain their right to vote. Specifically, I strongly support legislation that would allow people who have been convicted of a felony and *who are not incarcerated* to vote in federal elections, and thus urge you to co-sponsor the *Democracy Restoration Act*, H.R. 3335 / S. 1516, which was introduced by Congressman John Conyers (MI) and Senator Russ Feingold (WI) in July, 2009.

This legislation is needed to address existing felony disenfranchisement laws that currently disqualify almost 4 million Americans, none of whom are incarcerated, from voting. As a result of these laws roughly 1 out of every 50 adults in this country is not allowed to participate in the most fundamental aspect of being an American citizen. Furthermore, because these laws vary dramatically between states, as does the definition of a felony, it is possible that a young man or woman who writes one bad check can be banned from voting for the rest of his or her life.

Furthermore, the “war on drugs” has resulted in a disproportionate number of African Americans, especially African American men, being convicted of felony offenses. As a result, 13% of all African American men today are prohibited from voting. Felony voting restrictions are the last vestige of voting prohibitions; when the U.S. was founded, only wealthy white men were allowed to vote. Women, minorities, illiterates and the poor were excluded. These restrictions have all been eliminated over time, often with much debate and rancor. People who have served their time and been released from prison are the last Americans to be denied their basic American rights.

Because the right to vote is such an integral and basic element of being an American citizen, it seems to me that we should be encouraging ex-felons to participate in the electoral process, not prohibiting it. Thus I strongly urge you to support any and all legislative initiatives that would achieve this goal. I hope that you will co-sponsor the *Democracy Restoration Act* and support these bills and that you will contact me soon to let me know what you are doing to promote this legislation, and what I can do to help.

Sincerely,

(sign and print your name and
remember to include your address)

*Don't forget to contact your
Representative in the House
and BOTH your U.S. Senators!*