

RESTORE THE VOTE MINNESOTA

Restoring the right to vote for those living in the community will make the law more clear and equitable, save government resources, and encourage positive participation.

The Problem

Minnesotans lose the right to vote until they have been released from supervision, including while they are living in the community, even if they never spent any time in prison or only served a short jail sentence. In 2011, of the 63,000 Minnesotans who were unable to vote due to a past criminal conviction, only about 16,000 were behind bars in prison or jail. In other words, 75% of those who have been denied the right to vote under Minnesota law are living in the community, working to earn a wage and support their families, and paying taxes. The number of people disenfranchised has greatly increased in recent years because felony convictions and sentence lengths, especially for drug offenses, have exploded. Since 1974, the percentage of voting age Minnesotans disenfranchised as a result of a criminal conviction has increased over 400%.

Felony disenfranchisement prevents Minnesotans with criminal convictions from having a stake in their communities, and a voice in decisions that affect all aspects of their lives. Although felony disenfranchisement impacts a growing number of all Minnesotans, as a result of disproportionate contact with the criminal justice system, African Americans and American Indians are disproportionately affected. In 2011, nearly 16,000 African-Americans, or roughly eight percent of African Americans who were old enough to vote, were disenfranchised. Although African-Americans make up roughly five percent of the Minnesota population, they represent over a quarter of the total number of those disenfranchised. American Indians make up less than two percent of the population, however, in 2011 American Indians comprised more than six percent of those disenfranchised.

This has long-lasting repercussions for the community: research has shown that children are more likely to vote as adults if they are raised by parents who engage in the voting process. By disenfranchising people who are not behind bars, we lose not only the voice of those directly impacted by disenfranchisement; we also discourage participation by future generations.

The Solution

Minnesota should pass legislation to allow people who have served their time and are living in their community to vote. By moving to this model, Minnesota will join thirteen states that disenfranchise only those persons who are incarcerated for a felony conviction: Hawaii, Illinois, Indiana, Massachusetts, Michigan, Montana, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Utah. This reform will promote successful reintegration into the community, as voting can be a powerful, concrete and symbolic way to contribute to one's community and to feel invested and empowered to play a positive role. Research has shown that persons with criminal convictions in their past are less likely to be arrested again in states that restore voting rights after release from incarceration than in states where they face permanent disenfranchisement. Law enforcement and corrections professionals therefore agree that encouraging individuals to take on this important responsibility makes sense. Additionally, a policy that permits all individuals who have served their time in jail or prison to vote reduces confusion among voters and election officials about who can vote, thereby easing election administration and reducing government costs.

Restoring the right to vote for those living in the community will positively engage more people in the democratic process, make the law clear and save resources, and ultimately make all Minnesota communities safer and more just.

Supporting Organizations

Public Safety/Legal

Minnesota Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers
Minnesota Community Corrections Association
Minnesota Corrections Association
Minnesota County Attorneys Association
State Public Defender

Faith Based Organizations

ISIAH
Joint Religious Legislative Coalition
Minnesota Catholic Conference
Minnesota Council of Churches
Minnesota Unitarian Universalist Social Justice Alliance

Direct Service Organizations

African Immigrant Services
American Indian OIC
Goodwill/Easter Seals MN
Integrated Community Solutions, Inc.
L.I.F.E. In Recovery
MN Adult and Teen Challenge
MN Community Action Partnership
Minnesota Recovery Connection
The Neighborhood Hub
Open Access Connections
St. Stephen's Human Services

Civic Engagement and Advocacy Organizations

ACLU of Minnesota
Children's Defense Fund-Minnesota
Citizens for Election Integrity Minnesota
Council on Crime and Justice
Growth & Justice
Land Stewardship Project
League of Women Voters Minnesota
Minnesota Coalition for the Homeless
MN Second Chance Coalition
Minnesotans Standing Together to End Poverty (MNSTEP)
NAACP St. Paul Branch
Organizing Apprenticeship Project
People For the American Way
Prison Policy Initiative
R3 Collaborative
TakeAction Minnesota
Ten25Fifty

For more information, to get updates on voting restoration work, or to have your organization added to this list, contact Mark Haase, 612-353-3035, haasem@crimeandjustice.org