

Voting Rights & Civic Power:

Navigating the
System After a Felony
Conviction

US Legal
Empowerment
Network



Acknowledgements

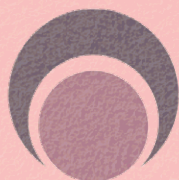
The Voting Rights and Civic Power Resource is a groundbreaking collaborative module created by members of the US Legal Empowerment Network (US LEN). The US LEN is an intergenerational, intersectional movement of organizers, lawyers, and community members working to ensure that people have the tools to know, use, shape and transform the laws and systems that govern their lives.

Systemic barriers continue to disenfranchise millions, separating communities from true representation. To bridge the gap between written laws and lived realities, network members convened a community roundtable bringing together directly impacted leaders, advocates, legal organizers, and scholars. Together, they examined the everyday barriers facing justice-impacted voters to design a tool that inspires democratic participation and builds community power.

The module was drafted by members from the Jailhouse Lawyers Initiative (JLI) and the Bernstein Institute for Human Rights at NYU Law, including authors Jhody Polk, Sukti Dhital, Tyler Walton, Darren Breeden, and Joshua Medina, along with Bernstein Institute Intern Anna Lebrun, whose extensive research provided the foundation for this module. We also honor the indispensable contributions of our roundtable participants—Adam Cain, Aminah Elster, BeKura Shabazz, Gale Muhammad, Jimmy Soto, Lee Gibson, Andy Williams, ML Smith, Nziki Wiltz, Pamela Fadem, Richard Midkiff, and Sophia Thomas—whose collective wisdom fueled this project.

Featured contributions were provided by Jhody Polk (Jailhouse Lawyers Initiative), Darren Breeden (Jailhouse Lawyers Initiative), Jimmy Soto (Exoneree), Adam Cain (Initiate Justice), ML Smith (Missouri Justice Coalition), Nziki Wiltz (Voice of the Experienced), and Delroy T. (Jailhouse Lawyers Initiative).

The module has been distributed to the JLI's inside membership—reaching over 1,400 members through its newsletter—and across the collective networks of the USLEN to build power from the inside out. Together, these voices remind us that those closest to the problem are closest to the solution, offering a practical guide to know, use, shape, and transform the law.



Robert and Helen Bernstein
Institute for Human Rights
NYU SCHOOL OF LAW



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Welcome to the Voting Rights and Civic Power Module

Navigating the complex landscape of voting rights after a felony conviction often feels intimidating or too complex, where geography determines whether your voice is heard or silenced. This resource serves as a roadmap through many of those complexities. Beginning with an invitation into the world of voting and civic participation by JLI founder and director Jhody Polk, it then offers a look at “What’s on the Ballot?” to illustrate how local officials and ballot measures directly shape life both inside and outside of carceral facilities.

The module then provides a comprehensive state-by-state breakdown of the laws governing the impact of felony convictions and incarceration on voting, the varying paths to restore your right to vote, and steps you and your peers can take.

We've broken this section into the following five categories:

- *Voting on the Inside*: States where your right to vote is never lost (ME, VT, DC).
- *Restoration Upon Release*: States where voting eligibility returns immediately upon leaving prison (CA, CO, CT, HI, IL, IN, MD, MA, MI, MN, MT, NV, NH, NJ, NM, NY, ND, OH, OR, PA, RI, UT, WA).
- *Restoration Upon Completion of Supervision*: States requiring full completion of parole or probation (AK, DE, ID, IA, KS, KY, LA, MO, NE, NC, OK, SC, WV, WI, WY).
- *Restoration Contingent on Financial Obligations*: States requiring full completion of supervision along with the payment of court fines, fees, or restitution (AL, AZ, AR, FL, GA, SD, TX).
- *Petition-Based Restorations*: States requiring executive pardons, legislative votes, or individual court petitions (MS, TN, VA).

Interwoven with these legal frameworks are the powerful narratives of formerly incarcerated legal organizers Darren Breeden, Jimmy Soto, Adam Cain, ML Smith and Nziki Wiltz whose experiences highlight the logistical hurdles of reentry and the potential for civic power beyond the ballot. The module also offers information on voting while in jail or on appeal, and a state by state list of government agencies and non-profit organizations that can help answer questions and assist you in getting registered to vote.

The module closes with reflection and discussion questions to further explore the role of voting rights and civic empowerment in the shaping and transforming of ourselves, our communities, and democracy at large. As always, please share your thoughts and insights as we seek to build a more just, dignified world together.



I. Why Voting? Why We Must Participate

VOTING, LEGAL EMPOWERMENT, AND THE LEADERSHIP OF JAILHOUSE LAWYERS

A more inclusive democracy is the best democracy. | An Invitation, Not a Lecture

Jhody Polk, JLI Founder and Director

In 2017, I began working as a campaign organizer for Florida's Amendment 4, known as the Say Yes to Second Chances campaign. Amendment 4 sought to restore voting rights to more than one million Floridians with felony convictions who had completed the terms of their sentences, except those convicted of murder or felony sexual offenses.

I want to be honest: when I first joined the campaign, I did not care about voting.

I did not have strong feelings about it one way or the other. My attention was focused on continuing my education, getting into law school, and becoming a lawyer. At the time, I was earning my associate degree in paralegal studies at the College of Central Florida. Someone told me that building community and becoming involved in a social movement might strengthen my future law school application. That was one of the reasons I joined the Florida Rights Restoration Coalition.

I say this at the beginning because I do not want anyone reading this module to feel that they are being lectured by someone who always understood the importance of voting. I did not.

If voting feels irrelevant to your life, or like a game that has never included you, you are not behind. You are where I started.

This section is called Why Voting? Why We Must Participate because participation is not optional for communities whose lives are constantly shaped by public decisions. If we do not participate, decisions will still be made. Laws will still be written. Budgets will still be approved. Officials will still exercise power. The only question is whether our knowledge, needs, and vision will be present when those decisions are made.

The invitation: This module will not tell you that you have to vote. It does make a case that we must participate. Voting is one form of participation.



Organizing, educating, advocating, testifying, attending meetings, building community, and holding officials accountable are others. Each person can decide how to use the ballot, but none of us is powerless.

MEETING DESMOND MEADE

Through the campaign, I met Desmond Meade. Desmond was the first formerly incarcerated movement leader I had ever met.

Desmond had survived incarceration, substance use, and homelessness. He later returned to school and earned an associate degree, a bachelor's degree, and a law degree from Florida International University College of Law. He became president and executive director of the Florida Rights Restoration Coalition, an organization led by returning citizens and their families. Desmond understood disenfranchisement personally. In 2016, when his wife, Sheena Meade, ran for the Florida Legislature, he could support her campaign, encourage other people to vote, and help build political power—but he could not cast a vote for his own wife.

A man who could not vote helped move an entire state. Many incarcerated people occupy that same position right now.

Desmond did not build a movement that treated formerly incarcerated people as the subjects of someone else's campaign. He helped build a movement where returning citizens spoke for ourselves. We met with voters, elected officials, faith leaders, lawyers, and community organizations. We shared our stories, explained the harm caused by disenfranchisement, and demanded a voice in the decisions affecting our lives.

That leadership mattered to me. Before meeting Desmond, I did not know that formerly incarcerated people were leading movements for justice across the country and around the world. Seeing someone with lived experience at the center of a statewide movement helped me recognize new possibilities for my own leadership.

It also showed me something jailhouse lawyers already know: the people closest to injustice often carry knowledge that the system does not have. We are not only people affected by the law. We are people capable of understanding it, using it, shaping it, and transforming it.

DISCOVERING THAT I HAD LOST MY VOICE

Before joining the campaign, it had not fully occurred to me that I could not vote. My felony conviction meant that I had lost my civil rights in Florida.

Florida's system of felony disenfranchisement was tied to the struggle over Black political power. In 1868, during Reconstruction—when formerly enslaved Black people were gaining citizenship and voting rights—Florida expanded the categories of criminal convictions that could result in disenfranchisement. Criminal laws and enforcement practices later targeted Black Floridians disproportionately, allowing conviction to become a continuing method of political exclusion.

By 2016, approximately 5.9 million people nationwide were disenfranchised because of felony convictions. Florida alone prevented approximately 1.6 million people from voting, including more than one in five Black adults in the state.

For a brief period beginning in 2007, Florida allowed many people with certain convictions to have their rights restored without an individual hearing after completing their sentences. But in 2011, the Governor and Florida Cabinet eliminated that process and imposed new waiting periods.

Under those rules, many people had to wait five or seven years after completing every part of their sentence before they could even apply. An arrest during that waiting period—even for a misdemeanor and even if no charge was ultimately filed—could restart the clock. Some applicants had to appear personally before the governor and the clemency board and ask to have their rights returned.

By the time I joined the campaign, I had been released from prison, returned to school, reunited with my family, and begun rebuilding my life. Yet the state still did not consider me fully qualified to participate in its democracy.

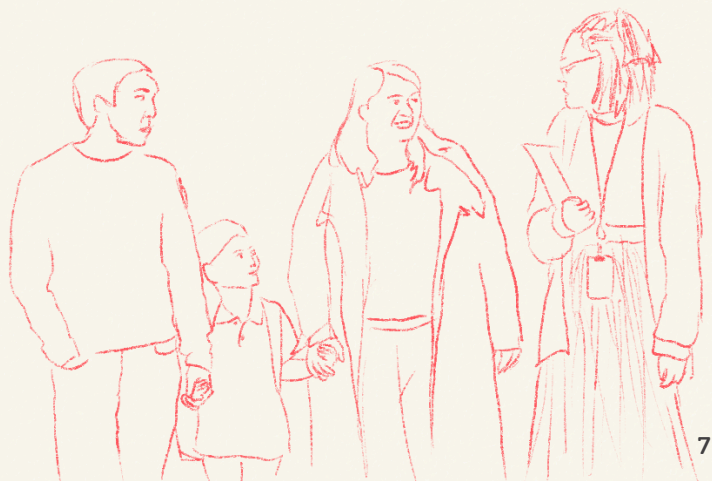
Civil death: An old legal idea called civil death treated a person convicted of a serious crime as if they had died as a member of the political community. Today, a conviction may still affect voting, jury service, public office, or a notary commission, depending on state law. The consequences are different in every state, which is why accurate legal information matters.

LEARNING WHAT WE ACTUALLY VOTE FOR

At first, disenfranchisement felt distant from my everyday life. I understood voting mainly as something people did during presidential elections. I knew that we voted for the president, but I did not understand how many state and local officials were also selected by voters—or how much influence those officials had over my family, my community, and my daily life.

Through the campaign, I learned that voters may help select governors, state legislators, mayors, city and county commissioners, sheriffs, judges, prosecutors, public defenders, school board members, and many other public officials. The offices on a ballot differ from one state and community to another.

In Florida, voters elect a state attorney and a public defender in each judicial circuit. State attorneys lead the offices that prosecute criminal cases. Public defenders lead the offices responsible for representing people who cannot afford an attorney. Florida voters also participate in selecting many trial court judges and county sheriffs.



I had lived through the criminal legal system without realizing that people in my community helped choose some of the officials who operated that system.

The president had always felt far removed from my reality. Local officials did not. Local and state officials made or influenced decisions about policing, prosecution, public defense, courts, schools, housing, transportation, healthcare, employment, public safety, and the use of public money.

Voting was not only about who would occupy the White House. It was also about asking: Who has authority over the institutions shaping our everyday lives?

Disenfranchisement was no longer just a Black History Month story about Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., the march from Selma, and the struggle for the Voting Rights Act. It was not merely history.

I was living it.

Why, after all these years, was it still so important to prevent people like me from voting? By the time I became inspired to use my vote, I had already lost it.

START WITH WHAT PEOPLE CARE ABOUT

At a civic power conference hosted by The Sentencing Project, I heard something that stayed with me: we have to meet people where they are and begin with what they care about.

We cannot ask someone to care about our issue while ignoring the reality they are living through. A person struggling inside a cell may not be moved by a general speech about democracy. A mother worried about rent may not begin with criminal legal reform. Someone else may be thinking about healthcare, education, employment, food, immigration, environmental safety, reproductive freedom, or the future of their children.

That does not mean they do not care about democracy. It means democracy has not yet been connected to what they care about.

Voting becomes meaningful when people can see the relationship between an issue affecting their lives and the public officials, laws, policies, budgets, and ballot questions that influence it. A question before an invitation: Before asking someone to vote, ask: What is happening in your life? What do you wish were different? Who has the authority to change it? What decisions are being made without you?

BRINGING THE HUMAN BEING BACK INTO THE SYSTEM

Another lesson from the conference was that justice-impacted people bring the human being back into systems.

Institutions often respond to charts, case numbers, budgets, risk scores, and statistics. Those things can be useful, but none of them can fully explain what it means to be separated from your children, prosecuted without adequate counsel, denied medical care, placed in isolation, or returned home without housing, work, or a voice.

Our lived experiences give public decisions a human face. Our stories show what policies do after they leave a legislative chamber, courtroom, or agency office and enter a real person's life.

The system uses the language of criminal justice, but the people it has labeled criminals may be among those most qualified to help create the conditions for justice. We know what dehumanization feels like. We know what gets missed when laws are written without the knowledge of those who must live under them.

Justice does not become more human by excluding the human beings who know the system most intimately.

A more inclusive democracy is not simply a democracy with more names on the voter rolls. It is a democracy where the people most affected by public decisions help make, question, shape, and transform those decisions.

International human rights law recognizes participation in public affairs, voting, seeking election, and equal access to public service as fundamental rights. Voting is not the whole of democracy, but excluding millions of people from it weakens democracy for everyone.

A PEOPLE-POWERED VICTORY

That understanding transformed the Amendment 4 campaign for me. It was no longer something I was doing to improve my résumé or increase my chances of getting into law school. It became personal.

The campaign was led by returning citizens, but it reached across racial, religious, political, and economic differences. Directly impacted people and our families built relationships with civil rights organizations, faith communities, lawyers, advocates, and voters across Florida.

Together, organizers and volunteers collected close to one million petition signatures. More than 766,000 verified signatures were required to place the amendment on the 2018 ballot.

Then, on November 6, 2018, the people of Florida voted.

Amendment 4 received 5,148,926 yes votes—64.55 percent of all votes cast on the amendment. Because a Florida constitutional amendment requires at least 60 percent approval, the people's vote changed the state constitution. The victory made as many as 1.4 million Floridians potentially eligible to regain their voting rights after completing the terms of their sentences.

We won the people's vote. But the struggle did not end there.

In 2019, the Florida Legislature passed Senate Bill 7066, which defined completion of a sentence to include payment of certain fines, fees, costs, and restitution. Governor Ron DeSantis signed the bill into law. For many returning citizens, money became another barrier between them and the ballot box.

If you are thinking, “that is exactly why I do not trust any of this”, I understand. That response is not ignorance. It is an accurate reading of what happened.

But notice what happened next.

The movement responded with more movement. Returning citizens, organizers, attorneys, donors, advocates, and organizations helped people determine

what they owed, seek modifications where possible, and satisfy outstanding financial obligations. The Florida Rights Restoration Coalition's Fines and Fees Program raised millions of dollars and helped thousands of returning citizens move closer to the ballot box.

Because of that collective effort, I eventually became eligible to vote again.

The lesson is not that the system is fair. It is not. The lesson is that organized people can move it—and when it moves back, organized people can move again.

PROGRESS IS POSSIBLE—AND THE WORK IS UNFINISHED

For years, national estimates placed the number of people disenfranchised because of felony convictions near six million. In 2024, researchers estimated that the number had fallen to approximately four million—about one out of every 59 voting-eligible adult citizens. That was a 31 percent decline from 2016.

Four million people denied a voice is still a profound injustice. Black communities also remain disproportionately affected: approximately one out of every 22 voting-eligible Black adults was disenfranchised in 2024.

But the decline tells us something important. Laws are not permanent simply because they have existed for a long time. Organizing, litigation, legislation, ballot initiatives, and public education have restored rights to millions of people.

In July 2026, Missouri enacted a law expected to restore voting eligibility to approximately 41,100 people on felony probation or parole, although exclusions remain for certain convictions. We have included reflections on this legislative win from organizer and activist ML Smith.

In Virginia, a federal court ruled in 2026 that the state could not automatically strip voting rights for every felony conviction under a federal law adopted when Virginia reentered the Union after the Civil War. The decision made thousands of people newly eligible, although implementation and the rules for particular convictions remain complicated.

Why current information matters: Rights-restoration laws are changing. A rule that was correct five years ago—or even last year—may be wrong today. Jailhouse lawyers should use current, state-specific sources



and should never tell someone they are eligible until the law and the person's circumstances have been carefully checked.

RESTORING A RIGHT IS NOT THE SAME AS INSPIRING ITS USE

I wish I could tell you that I immediately used my restored right.

I did not.

Even after I became eligible, it took me several years to cast my first ballot.

That experience taught me what I now consider the center of this module: restoring someone's legal right to vote is not the same as inspiring that person to use it.

Information alone is not always enough. People must be able to see how voting connects to their families, their communities, the issues they care about, and the future they want to build. I had to move from knowing that I could vote to understanding why I might choose to vote.

I came to see civic engagement as a responsibility I wanted to claim—not because someone forced that responsibility upon me, but because decisions were being made about my life whether I participated in them or not.

THE LEGAL EMPOWERMENT CONNECTION

This is where jailhouse lawyers come in.

Legal empowerment teaches us that people need more than a law written on paper. We need the knowledge, tools, relationships, and confidence to understand the law, use it, shape it, and transform it.

Voting can be approached through that same process:

- **Know:** Learn who is eligible, what rights have been lost or restored, what appears on the ballot, and which offices hold authority over the issues we care about.
- **Use:** Register when eligible, cast an informed ballot, attend public meetings, contact representatives, submit testimony, and help other people exercise their rights.

- **Shape:** Bring lived experience into public conversations, organize families and communities, question officials, propose solutions, and help decide which issues receive attention.
- **Transform:** Change the laws, institutions, budgets, and practices that create injustice—and create new tables when existing tables refuse to include us.

People cannot use a right they do not know they have. They cannot make an informed choice about a ballot they do not understand. And they cannot connect voting to change if no one helps them identify where power sits.

Jailhouse lawyers already do this work. We translate legal language, share information, help people recognize a legal issue, and connect knowledge to action. Civic engagement is another place where that leadership belongs.

PROXIMITY BEFORE PERSUASION

We should not begin by telling people what they must do. We begin by getting close enough to understand what they are experiencing and what they care about.

Who is more proximate to incarcerated and justice-impacted communities than jailhouse lawyers?

We live beside people as they struggle with their cases, their sentences, their families, their health, their hopes, and their fear. We know why someone might distrust a government that has harmed them. We also know how much knowledge and leadership exist inside prison walls.

That proximity gives us a responsibility to listen before we educate and to understand before we persuade.

A jailhouse lawyer's starting point shouldn't begin with, "You need to vote". Begin with, "What do you care about? What is happening to your family or community? What would justice look like to you?" Then help the person trace that issue to the laws, institutions, budgets, and decision-makers connected to it.

POWER FROM INSIDE—INCLUDING FOR PEOPLE SERVING LIFE

This work matters even for people serving life sentences.

Norris Henderson shared a story about fifty incarcerated people who engaged their family

members on the outside. Those fifty people helped produce five hundred votes.

Norris knows this kind of power personally. He was wrongfully incarcerated for 27 years at the Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola. While inside, he was a jailhouse lawyer and helped build the Angola Special Civics Project with other incarcerated men, including men serving life. After his release, he founded Voice of the Experienced, known as VOTE, and continued organizing directly impacted people and their families across Louisiana.

The fifty-to-five-hundred story gives us a different way to think about political power. A person does not have to personally enter a voting booth to help shape what happens there. One incarcerated person can educate a mother, a partner, two siblings, an adult child, or a circle of friends. Those conversations can become informed votes, public testimony, meeting attendance, organizing, and long-term community leadership.

That is not a consolation prize for someone who cannot vote. That is organizing.

If voting did not matter, why has so much energy been spent keeping us from it?

WHY WE MUST PARTICIPATE

We must participate because public decisions do not pause when our voices are absent.

When directly impacted people are excluded, systems are left to make decisions about incarceration, policing, prosecution, sentencing, prison conditions, reentry, housing, healthcare, education, and employment without the knowledge of the people who live with the consequences.

Participation is how we bring that knowledge into the public square. It is how we challenge stigma, make our families visible, place human rights on the public agenda, and insist that our communities are more than case files and statistics.

We must participate because a democracy cannot become more inclusive by continuing to exclude the people who understand its deepest failures. And we must participate because our communities deserve more than decisions made for us. They deserve decisions shaped with us.

VOTING IS NOT THE END OF PARTICIPATION

Voting is one way to participate in democracy. It is not the only way.



Our communities also need justice-impacted people who will:

- Attend city commission, county commission, school board, and other public meetings.
- Ask questions about budgets, policies, contracts, jail conditions, policing, healthcare, housing, education, and reentry.
- Meet with elected officials and require them to respond to the people most affected by their decisions.
- Create community meetings and build our own tables when we are not invited to existing ones.
- Bring our language, stories, relationships, history, and culture into public decision-making.
- Serve on boards, commissions, juries, and other civic bodies when eligible under state law.
- Run for office when eligible—and support directly impacted candidates who understand our communities.

Participation also means organizing, educating, writing, testifying, demonstrating, building mutual aid, challenging harmful laws, proposing new laws, and holding public officials accountable after Election Day.

A vote can help decide who holds power. Organizing helps determine what that person does with it.

VOTING AS A STRATEGY

This module does not suggest that voting will solve every problem facing our communities.

Many people have well-earned reasons for distrusting political institutions. Candidates break promises. Elected officials ignore communities. Systems protect power instead of people. Institutions claiming to represent us have excluded, criminalized, incarcerated, and disenfranchised us.

Voting alone will not free us.

But voting can be a strategy.

It is one tool among many, used alongside organizing, legal advocacy, political education, community building, direct action, mutual aid, litigation, storytelling, healing, and movement work. Like every tool, it becomes more powerful when we understand what it can do, what it cannot do, and where it fits in a larger plan.

Jailhouse lawyers are already civic leaders. Even when we are prohibited from entering a voting booth, we study the law, help other people understand their rights, challenge injustice, solve problems, and strengthen our communities.

WHAT JAILHOUSE LAWYERS CAN DO FROM INSIDE

Help people determine whether they may be eligible to vote now. People detained pretrial and many people serving misdemeanor sentences may remain eligible, depending on state law.

Help incarcerated people learn what their state requires for rights restoration after release.

Correct misinformation while being careful not to give anyone unverified eligibility advice.

Help people identify the issues they care about and trace those issues to public offices, laws, budgets, and elections.

Educate family members and friends about candidates, policies, ballot initiatives, and local offices—without telling them whom they must support.

Ask loved ones on the outside to carry the experiences and concerns of incarcerated people into their voting decisions.

Prepare returning citizens not only to register and vote, but also to become organizers, advocates, community educators, board members, candidates, and civic leaders.

Document the human impact of laws and policies so decision-makers cannot reduce our communities to charts and statistics.





Closing: The Heroes Our Communities Have Been Waiting For

Our political power does not begin when the state gives us permission to vote, and it does not end when an election is over.

The invitation of this module is not simply to become a voter. It is to become an informed and engaged participant in the decisions that shape our lives. It is to understand where power sits, how public decisions are made, and which strategies can help our communities influence them.

We do not have to wait for someone else to bring humanity, knowledge, courage, or leadership into these systems. Justice-impacted people are not outside of democracy looking in. We are part of the public. Our families are part of the public. Our knowledge belongs in every conversation about law, safety, justice, and freedom.

We are the heroes our communities have been waiting for.

So the question is not only: Will I vote? The deeper questions are:

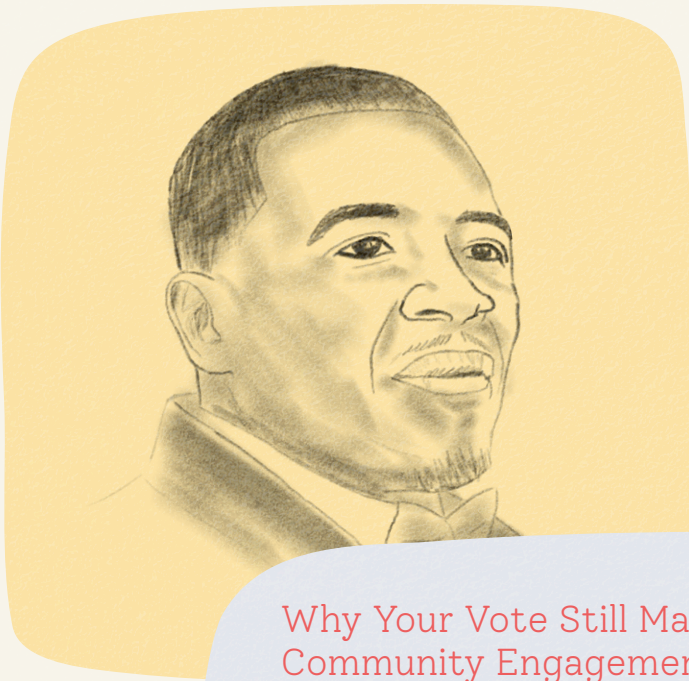
What kind of democracy do we want to live in?

What changes do our communities need?

Who holds the authority to make or influence those changes?

How can we bring our lived knowledge into the decisions being made?

And how might voting—alongside organizing, advocacy, education, and community leadership—help us move closer to freedom?



Why Your Vote Still Matters – Darren Breedon, Director of Community Engagement, JLI

To Anyone Who Has Ever Served Time and Wondered If They Still Count—The Answer Is Yes.

During my 30 years of incarceration, I often felt like my existence lay far outside the societal framework I was supposed to be a part of. Personally, the message I felt society was sending—sometimes spoken, sometimes just felt—is that you have no bearing on the world around you. I want to tell you plainly: if this is the same message you are sending yourself, it's wrong; both you and your vote matter.

The change in my life began when I began to internalize how my actions impacted my community; such clarity led me to investigate my positioning in society. As I began to examine myself internally, I realized I can impact my community, and one of the ways is exercising my right to vote. I also realized my citizenship did not expire because of my conviction. I started to see that many of the issues impacting me and my community could be addressed through my vote.

From a practical perspective, if we have to live in a community impacted by what we call the system, live under its laws, be taxed by it, raise children in it, and face consequences prescribed by it, then we have to exercise our right as a citizen to impact the system. Especially as someone who frequently complained about the judicial system, how could I speak out against unfair policing while choosing not to vote for the mayor, sheriff, district attorney, or other leaders who shape public safety in my community? Even if it means leading our families to the voting box, we must make sure the generation does not have oppression operating against them and be the change we desire.

While state laws vary and some make it far more difficult than others for formerly incarcerated people to vote, not voting allows those lawmakers to ignore the needs of the communities they represent. Additionally, not voting is not the answer because silence reads as absence, and absence gets ignored. We have been ignored as individuals and communities for far too long.

Honestly, voting doesn't erase the past or undo the harm that was caused. But it says: **I am still here, I am still a citizen, and I still have a stake in what happens next.** For a lot of people coming home, rebuilding a sense of belonging is the hardest part. Voting isn't the whole answer to that, but it's a real piece of it—proof, in your own hand, that you have not been erased.

You served your time, and you are not required to also surrender your voice.

With respect and solidarity,
Darren Breedon

II. What's on the Ballot?

When we think of elections, we tend to consider the major contests that dominate the news and tv ads – the presidential race, contested congressional offices, and occasionally, hot button policy issues. These races are at the top of the ballot, but they're far from the only, or even most, significant choices that people have when exercising their right to vote. As you move down the ballot, you will see contests for state/local offices and local policy measures: the offices with some of the most direct power over our lives are often the offices that the fewest people vote for.

At the state level, you can vote for offices like the Governor (and Lieutenant Governor), who act as the executive for the state, the General Assembly/ State Legislature, responsible for drafting laws and approving budgets, and the Attorney General, who is the chief legal officer and law enforcement official, representing the state government and its laws in legal disputes.

Delroy T. is a Jailhouse Lawyer and JLI member based out of New York. He explains how voting profoundly affects life inside:

Why should the general public care if prisoners are concerned with the governor's race? If you asked yourself this question, think back to 2024 when video surfaced of Robert Brooks being callously beaten and bludgeoned to death. Think back to Messiah Nantwi who suffered the same fate mere months later in a prison right next to the one where Brooks was murdered. Think about what these deaths mean. The collective "I told you so", a refrain of state prisoners came pouring out in the form of letters, essays, and through grassroots advocates in peaceful demonstrations and lobbying.

The ensuing illegal strike by prison guards reflected the indifference of the department at large. The wildcat strike came in direct support of the guards who were charged with Brooks murder. These are men and women who have taken the oath to uphold the state constitution who found it feasible, to abscond from their posts and support their colleagues who clearly and callously took a human's life.

Delroy goes on to reflect on how accountability in leadership matters. He outlines what could change if political leadership shifts.

There would be no more fixed or body worn

cameras. After the camera's deployment, the incidents of prisoner on staff assaults have fallen off the cliff. This was not a population of over thirty thousand suddenly being corrected by the guards, it was the watchful eye of the video cameras and microphones. [...]

There would be no more programs for education and rehabilitation. These are essentially services indirectly provided for by the federal constitutions guarantee against cruel and unusual punishment. See, Eighth Amendment. There would be restrictions or elimination of visits, packages, and time out of the cell for recreation and other pro-social activities: things that promote good behavior and rehabilitation.

Gone would be the HALT Law. The law came into effect in 2024 and restricted the draconian use of solitary confinement. The illegally striking guards blamed this law for increased violence and an unsafe work environment. Legislators removed an egregiously abused tool which had been utilized to indiscriminately throw prisoners away to rot in cells for at least 23 hours a day and curtailed their ability to rig administrative hearings held prior to doling out years, in some cases, for low level drug offenses. This established some semblance of due process. Succinctly, HALT did just what its name implies: Halted or reduced the instances of abuse against incarcerated individuals by the guards and drastically reduced the exposure to the harmful psychological effects of solitary confinement.

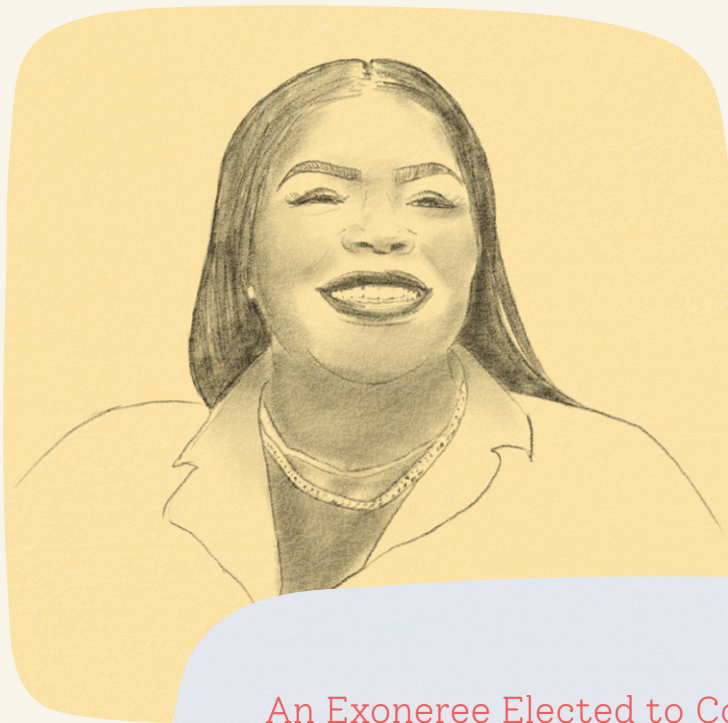
This and other guardrails could be removed with the stroke of a pen.

Turnout in local elections is typically much lower than turnout in presidential elections. Local races have been decided by a few hundred votes, a handful of votes, and sometimes only one or two votes. That means our families, friends, and communities have more power than we may realize—especially when we are informed, organized, and voting around the issues that affect our lives.

These elections can determine who runs the jail, who decides what charges to bring, who sets policies around bail and diversion, how public money is spent, and whether our communities receive resources, punishment, surveillance, or support.

You can vote for **School Board Members**, who create policy for the public schools in your area, creating the

yearly budget, drawing districting lines, and establishing regulations governing student success and safety. Your **County Commissioner** oversees the creation and maintenance of public works (they're the ones fixing your potholes (or not), setting property tax rates, and making development policy. Some jurisdictions also elect the **Court Clerk** – the position which former jailhouse lawyer Calvin Duncan won in Louisiana. Nziki Wiltz, an organizer and activist, shares the story of his election and subsequent political maneuvering that led to the elimination of the position below.



An Exoneree Elected to Court Clerk

Nziki Wiltz on the Election of Calvin Duncan

Nziki Wiltz is a voting rights activist in New Orleans, often called the “voter registration lady.” Before finding her voice as an organizer, Wiltz was an educator, working as a Social Studies teacher in Orleans Parish schools. She sees her activism as a continuation of her work as an educator:

“I used to just want to get children past the finish line, now I want to get them past the finish line with a clear understanding of what is before them.”

Wiltz played a key role in mobilizing voters for Calvin Duncan’s historic election to become clerk of New Orleans criminal court, the very same court where he was wrongfully convicted of murder.

“We all assumed that this wasn’t going to work. There wasn’t going to be a good turnout. People do not want an incarcerated man in office. But everybody was interested, even the people that didn’t support the work we were doing. They even voted for Calvin. His story caught attention everywhere: ‘He was innocent? He went back to school, and proved that reform can happen? And now he could get people out – innocent people, people who were unfairly sentenced, people who have been harmed?’ People were able to connect on either side of the spectrum.”

With his story catching attention, Duncan's campaign took off. Wiltz details getting calls from around the world asking how to support Duncan's campaign, hosting small forums with turnouts so large the crowd could not fit in the hall. Duncan won the election with 68% of the vote, a landslide victory – but days before he was supposed to enter office, the state legislature passed a law abolishing his position and combining it with the existing civil clerk office, a clear attack from the Governor and Attorney General who had spent months trying to discredit his campaign and exoneration.

Many voters became disenchanted by this loss – they turned out, they won the election, but they still lost the seat. For Wiltz, who has spent years trying to activate voters across New Orleans, the loss was especially profound, but she hasn't lost hope:

"I didn't get scared, I wanted to fight more, because I felt like, now I'm in the ring, I gotta keep fighting, because I know that this is wrong, what they're doing."

Duncan plans to run for the combined clerk seat, and Wiltz will campaign behind him again. She reflected on her next steps:

"What's next is us going back into communities, doing this all over again, but going a little deeper. Show our wins, our setbacks, and our what's next, and tell them how we need them, how we need them to engage and be a part of it. Letting them know, this can't be a fight that's done alone."

You are also able to vote for **law enforcement officers**, including Sheriffs, District Attorneys, and Judges. These officials guide law enforcement policies at all levels, overseeing the conditions of jails, determining whether to bring charges, and deciding sentencing. In some states, you can even vote in judicial retention elections, deciding whether presiding judges should remain in office.

These are just a few examples of the officials that you can vote for at each level. Be sure to review which seats are contested on the ballot for your upcoming election and learn about what responsibilities those officials will have in your community.

In addition to electing the officials who represent us in government, voters are able to directly weigh in on their state and local laws through **ballot measures**. A ballot measure is a specific policy or constitutional amendment on a statewide or local ballot that citizens directly vote on during an election. These include initiatives, referendums, charters, millages, and proposals. Ballot measures often cover local issues, like property tax rates and school districting, where your vote can have an immediate effect. They have also decided important issues, such as legalization of same-sex marriage, marijuana, and abortions. Among the most contested measures on the ballot this November are California's proposed "billionaire tax," laws protecting or restricting access to gender-affirming care and trans athletes in sports (on the ballot in Arizona, Colorado, Missouri, and Washington), and a slew of punitive bail and sentencing laws across Alabama, Colorado, Indiana, Louisiana, and Tennessee. [Ballotpedia](#), an online encyclopedia of American politics and elections, maintains a comprehensive list of local and statewide ballot measures on the docket this November.

Voting on these measures is one of the few ways our government facilitates direct democracy; it gives citizens a chance to directly contribute to the development of their state policies, and choose which laws best serve their states and communities. Below is a story from Adam Cain, a political activist from California, highlighting the power of civic engagement in ballot measures.



Adam Cain, Political Activist with [Initiate Justice](#), California

Adam first became involved with organizing while working at the PIA (Prison Industrial Authority), both in the laundry room and serving as a Time and Leave Clerk in California. At that time he was given a survey to give his input on Proposition 57, a state ballot measure that, if approved by the voters, would restructure and expand the credit-earning opportunities to count towards early release. Adam distributed the survey around to his peers, and received over 800 responses. These survey responses and testimonies from the inside helped advocate and shape the proposition. As an organizer, Adam also helped communicate with families and communities on the outside about the real-world impact of ballot measures, helping to drive civic participation and informed voting.

“When I was inside, I couldn’t vote, but my vote mattered because I was voting through my family and my friends.”

When the proposition was passed in 2016, Adam saw a change immediately. Working as a Time and Leave Clerk, Adam saw his peers’ release dates move forward and was with them to celebrate the good news. He saw people who previously abstained from prison programming, not believing in its value, begin enrolling in educational courses and working towards degrees, empowered by the knowledge that their efforts would help them get out.

“When Prop 57 passed, people that were doubting started to believe in the system. Believing that we can change it if we come together and understand how to work in it.”

Once introduced to inside organizing, Adam got involved. He took a curriculum to learn about inside organizing, and got more involved in the legislative process. When public discussions around Proposition 17 began, Adam contributed to these policy conversations, advocating for person-first language like “person on parole.” When the proposition was approved in the 2020 election, thousands of Californians’ voting rights were restored upon release from prison rather than completion of parole.

Adam was released early, his time-off credits earned from his education and work as an incarcerated fire fighter counting towards a sentence reduction under Prop 57’s expanded framework. When he cast his first vote in the 2022 midterm elections, it was thanks to the reenfranchisement established by Prop 17. Now, working as a political activist on the outside, seeing the outcome of his work on the inside inspires him to keep working:

“The legendary work that we did as a team, whether I’m on the inside or outside, I feel like I can continue to carry that on. When I have my low spirits and my low times, I always can just kind of pick myself up by thinking about the work that I did, and how I contributed, and what I plan to do to continue to contribute.”

III. Voting Rights after a Felony Conviction: State by State Breakdown

Three seminal Supreme Court cases establish the constitutional foundation for felony disenfranchisement and jail-based voting that every jailhouse lawyer should know:

- *Richardson v. Ramirez*, 418 U.S. 24 (1974): The Supreme Court held that the Fourteenth Amendment permits states to disenfranchise people because of felony convictions. This decision helps explain why felony disenfranchisement laws have survived constitutional challenges.
- *Hunter v. Underwood*, 471 U.S. 222 (1985): The Supreme Court struck down part of Alabama's disenfranchisement law because it had been adopted with a racially discriminatory purpose and continued to have a discriminatory effect. A state's authority to disenfranchise is not permission to enact or maintain a law for an unconstitutional racial purpose.
- *O'Brien v. Skinner*, 414 U.S. 524 (1974): The Supreme Court held that a state could not deny eligible voters meaningful ballot access simply because they were confined in jail while giving absentee access to other voters. People in jail are not automatically ineligible; eligibility depends on conviction status and state law.

It's important to know that voting rights for individuals with felony convictions are determined by geography. For example, while individuals incarcerated in DC never lose their right to vote, those convicted of a felony in the neighboring state of Virginia can only regain their right to vote with a gubernatorial pardon. In Tennessee, thousands are permanently disenfranchised by their felony convictions under complex restoration laws.

To better understand what's happening in each state, this module contains a 50 state breakdown of the voting rights laws and practices across the country. Specifically it includes: (1) state-by-state breakdown of the laws governing the impact of felony convictions and incarceration on voting; (2) varying paths to restore your right to vote; and (3) steps you and your peers can take.

The states are organized by Restoration type: *Never Lose Your Right to Vote*, *Restoration Upon Release*, *Restoration Upon Completion of Parole and Probation*, and *Restoration Upon Completion of Parole, Probation, and Payment of Fees*.

A. Never Lose Your Right to Vote

In three states, Maine, Vermont, and DC, you never lose your right to vote, even if convicted of a felony. In these states you are able to vote while incarcerated.

While you legally have the right to vote, exercising it from prison can be challenging. In these states the percent of voters inside who actually cast a ballot in presidential elections hovers between 10-15%, significantly lower than the state's average turnout of 65-75%.¹ These turnout numbers also reflect the turnout rates upon release.² Low turnout numbers are attributed to both a lack of political interest and belief in the system, as well as challenges in outreach, information and access. Delays with prison mail, limited access to paperwork needed to vote, and limited capacity and training of corrections staff are just some of the logistical barriers.³

1 Peter Dizikes, [“Where legal, voting by those in prison is rare, study shows,”](#) MIT Political Science (2022).

2 Ibid.

3 [“Voting From Prison Lessons from Maine and Vermont,”](#) The Sentencing Project (2025)

In Maine, voting rights groups, including the NAACP, work with the Secretary of State to organize voter education programs, but these usually take place 2 years in advance of the elections and don’t always include all facilities.⁴ Unlike Vermont, there is no institutional policy mandating that prison staff provide support and guidance to voters inside.⁵

Bruce King, a board member for Maine’s Juvenile Justice Advisory Group, notes that “part of the challenge is that a lot of people in prison don’t feel like they are up to date enough to vote, but the ones that are tend to have a much stronger tie to their communities.”⁶

DC restored voting rights in 2020. At the Central Detention Facility (DC Jail) where some are serving short term sentences for their felony convictions, hallways are lined with informational posters and jail staff have been trained by the Department of Elections to help facilitate voting. However, because no long term facilities are located in DC, people are housed in nearby state prisons where other incarcerated individuals do not have the right to vote from inside. This causes barriers in exercising the right to vote.

4 Emma Davis, [“Incarcerated Mainers’ voting access is already challenged, but could become even harder”](#) Main Morningstar (2025)
5 Ibid.
6 Ibid.

Voting While Incarcerated		
	Voting from Prison	Steps to Consider Taking
Maine	Maine allows incarcerated people to vote.	1. You can request an absentee ballot while incarcerated in order to vote. 2. Use your last permanent residence or the municipality where you were born/last lived to determine where you should be registered while incarcerated. 3. While inside, share with your incarcerated peers that Maine is one of the only states where you never lose your right to vote.
Vermont	Vermont allows incarcerated people to vote. The Department of Corrections should provide voter registration forms to all Vermont residents.	1. You can request your ballot from the town clerk where you are registered to vote or from the Secretary of State while incarcerated. 2. While inside, share with your incarcerated peers that Vermont is one of the only states where you never lose your right to vote.
Washington D.C.	Washington D.C. allows incarcerated people to vote. The Board of Elections should send every D.C. resident who is incarcerated information about voting and a voter registration application. After you are registered, you should also be sent an absentee ballot to their facility.	1. If you have not received your voter registration application or absentee ballot, reach out to the D.C. board of elections. 2. While inside, share with your incarcerated peers that DC is one of the only places where you never lose your right to vote.

B. Restoration Upon Release from Prison

For individuals living in 23 states, voting rights will be automatically restored upon their release from prison. In these states, however, the voter turnout rate for eligible formerly incarcerated voters remains low, between 5 and 18%,¹ significantly lower than the average voter turnout of around 50%. What explains this trend? Both a lack of voter outreach and a lack of knowledge about rights restoration.

For example, in Colorado, a state with an 88% voter registration rate, you become eligible to vote immediately upon release from incarceration, but the registration rate for individuals on parole hovers around 27%.² Mixed messaging from official state resources may explain this discrepancy.

In 2019, the Colorado State Legislature restored voting rights for individuals on parole or probation,³ but this change of law did not reach the voter base. Anthony Kent was released in 2022. When he received his official reentry paperwork, he found a Voter Registration Choice Form stating that those who were serving parole or probation for a felony conviction were ineligible to register.⁴ To do so in Colorado would be a Class 1 misdemeanor, punishable by up to 18 months in jail. While Kent accepted the information on his form, his mother thought it seemed wrong and contacted the Office of the Secretary of State who confirmed her suspicions and told Kent:

“The NVRA choice form still needs to be updated, and we will work on that as soon as possible – we are just waiting to confirm whether or not some other changes to the form are necessary before updating it.”⁵

This case highlights two major issues preventing formerly incarcerated individuals from exercising their restored voting rights: (1) difficulty accessing clear and reliable voter information, and (2) a lack of consideration for and proactive outreach to formerly incarcerated individuals.

Even when restoration is supposed to be automatic on release, there can still be challenges to registering and voting. Some states have voter ID laws which require state driver’s licenses or getting a hold of your birth certificate. If your case is overturned or you are exonerated, prison officials might not give you the typical release papers. Coming up with a strategy to vote after release can be useful, even in states with restoration of rights on release. The story below of Jimmy Soto, Illinois’ longest serving wrongfully incarcerated person, illustrates these challenges in human terms.

1 Peter Dizikes, [“Where legal, voting by those in prison is rare, study shows,”](#) MIT Political Science (2022) .

2 Ilica Mahajan, et al. [“Paroled People Can Vote in Colorado. Why Did Forms Say They Couldn’t?”](#) The Marshall Project (2022)

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.



Story of an Exoneree – Jimmy Soto, Illinois

James “Jimmy” Soto was the longest-serving wrongfully incarcerated person in Illinois history, having spent 42 years in prison before his exoneration. He comes from a family of proud voters, and registered to vote when he turned 18. Jimmy cast his first vote from jail in the primary election, but was convicted before he could vote in the final election.

While inside, Jimmy was a prolific jailhouse lawyer and an active political organizer, working with organizations like Parole Illinois and PNAP, mobilizing to get rid of life sentencing, truth in sentencing, and bring back parole in Illinois.

“I wanted to get out, I was fighting to get out, but I knew the only other path was to change the law.”

Despite his legal and political organizing experience, when Jimmy was exonerated and released, he did not know how to register. As an exoneree, the system’s support organizations for parolees did not serve Jimmy. He left prison with no papers, no ID, no social security card, and no birth certificate, given only two small checks by the prison which he couldn’t cash without an ID. Without any documents, despite his close relationship with the system, Jimmy struggled to start the registration process. Though he was released in December before an election year, Jimmy missed the primary elections in June. He waited over a year and a half to receive his order of innocence.

When he finally voted in November, Jimmy went to the polls early to be sure he wouldn’t miss the chance:

“I’m very proud to not only have been released, but to have voted. I hadn’t voted in 40 years.”

Restoration Upon Release from Prison (23 States)

	Notification Requirement	Steps to Consider Taking
California	California Code, Penal Code – PEN § 4852.21 : The Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation must provide a formal notification letter and a voter registration card upon discharge.	1. Assert Proposition 17 Rights: Since 2020, people on parole can vote. If a registration official claims otherwise, cite the CA Constitution, Art. II, Sec. 2. 2. If you are in county jail for pre-trial or a misdemeanor, demand a registration form. State law requires jails to facilitate this. 3. If you are denied registration by a clerk, contact California Secretary of State (SOS) Voter Hotline or California Department of Justice (DOJ) Record Review Unit to ensure your record reflects your current eligibility.
Colorado	Colorado Policy Guidelines : The Department of Corrections personnel must inform individuals that their right to vote has been restored and provide them with voter education materials and registration forms during their first meeting with the division of adult parole.	1. Voting registration should happen “At the Gate”: Rights are restored immediately upon release from prison. You can register even while living in a halfway house or on parole. 2. “Remerg” is an organization that supports people in reentry: after release, go to their website for a comprehensive re-entry checklist that includes voter registration as a standard civil right.
Connecticut	Connecticut General Statutes § 9-46a(d) : State correction officials must provide individuals with a document informing them of their restored right to vote and a voter registration application at the time of release.	1. Voting rights are restored upon release from incarceration, including for parolees. Public Act 21-2 eliminated the “on parole” waiting period. 2. Administrative Cleanup: Contact the CT Voting Rights Project if your name has not been purged from the “ineligible” list despite being released.
Hawaii	There is no requirement for the Department of Corrections or Social Services to notify individuals that their voting rights have been restored. Discharge paperwork serves as sufficient notice.	• Since restoration is immediate upon release, register to vote as part of your initial re-entry check-in. • Use Hawaii’s online voter registration portal—you do not need a permanent home address to register (you can describe where you live).
Illinois	Illinois Compiled Statutes 730 ILCS 5/3-14-1 : The Department of Corrections must inform individuals of their restored voting eligibility upon release and provide them with a voter registration application.	• You are eligible to vote the moment you walk out of the prison gates. Register immediately; there is no waiting period. • State law requires jails to provide voting access to those awaiting trial. If denied, contact the organization “Chicago Votes” immediately to help you assert your SB 2090 Rights.
Indiana	Indiana Code Title 11. Corrections § 11-10-12-4 : The Department of Corrections must inform individuals of their right to vote, and provide them with a copy of the Indiana Voters Bill of Rights.	1. Your rights are restored the moment you are no longer incarcerated. You can vote even while on parole or probation. You should register to vote immediately after reentry. 2. If a clerk denies your registration due to a past conviction, contact Indiana Legal Services to file a formal appeal.

Restoration Upon Release from Prison (23 States)

Maryland	Department Directive Incarcerated Individuals Voting Rights and Procedures: The Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services must notify individuals of their restored voting rights upon release and provide them with a voter registration application. Exception: Those with felony convictions for buying or selling votes must wait 10 years to apply for a pardon, after the completion of their entire sentence, including prison and probation/parole/supervision. The governor grants pardons on a discretionary basis.	1. Voting rights are restored immediately upon release. Register to vote the day you walk out. 2. Look into joining Out for Justice to help educate others in the community that Maryland no longer requires the completion of parole or probation before voting.
Massachusetts	Massachusetts Department of Correction Policy 103 DOC 467: The correctional institution is required to provide instructions for registration, a voter registration form, and a postage guaranteed envelope to all people upon their release. They must also provide assistance with completing the registration process if requested.	1. Restoration is automatic upon release. You can register to vote immediately. 2. Keep your release papers handy to ensure your record is updated in the state's Central Voter Registry.
Michigan	House Bill No. 4983: The Department of Corrections is required to provide individuals with a notice of voting rights restoration and voter registration materials upon release. Individuals are automatically registered unless they opt out.	1. Restoration is automatic upon release. You can register to vote immediately. 2. If you have an issues with your local clerk's office, connect with the organization Michigan Voices to ensure correct compliance with "immediate restoration"
Minnesota	243.205 Notice Of Restoration Of Right To Vote: correctional facility officers must provide notice of eligibility and application to a person being released. Probation officers must provide the notice and application to all individuals under supervision.	1. You are eligible to vote immediately after incarceration. Register anytime after release, this includes those on parole or probation. 2. You can check your status on the Secretary of State's website 48 hours after registering to ensure no "felony flags" remain on your record.
Montana	There is no requirement for the Department of Corrections or Social Services to notify individuals that their voting rights have been restored. Discharge paperwork serves as sufficient notice.	1. You can register to vote, immediately after release from prison. 2. You can register on election day in Montana. Utilize Montana's same-day registration laws to register and vote on the same day, if you have not had a chance to register yet.

Restoration Upon Release from Prison (23 States)

Nevada	In 2019 Nevada passed Assembly Bill 431 , giving those who had been released from prison the right to vote. There is no requirement for the Department of Corrections or social services to notify individuals that their voting rights have been restored. Discharge paperwork serves as sufficient notice.	1. You can register to vote after release, it can be helpful to bring your discharge papers if you face any issues with the clerks office. 2. Look into joining Return Strong to advocate for transparency in how the Department of Corrections communicates release dates to the Secretary of State.
New Hampshire	NH 607-A : Prison officials must provide individuals with written notification of their restored voting rights upon release.	1. Voting rights are restored after release. You can register as soon as you are released. 2. If you are in a halfway house, you are still eligible to register. You can use that address to secure your ballot.
New Jersey	In 2020, NJ A5823 was passed, restoring the right to vote for people on probation and parole in NJ. N.J. Stat. § 19:4-1, N.J. Stat. § 30:1B-6.2: The Commissioner of Corrections is required to provide each incarcerated person, at least 10 days prior to their release from a State correctional facility, with “general written information on the inmate’s right to vote”.	1. You can register to vote once you are released from prison. People on parole and probation may vote in New Jersey. Your prison should be providing information about voting 10 days prior to release. 2. If a registration official asks about your conviction, cite the 2020 law that restored rights to those on supervision.
New Mexico	New Mexico Statutes § 1-4-27.1 : Department of Corrections must provide an opportunity to register to vote upon release.	1. Voting rights are restored after release. Register to vote as part of your re-entry. 2. If you are living on tribal lands, you can work with tribal organizations to ensure local satellite voting offices are accessible to formerly incarcerated members.
New York	Chapter 103 of the Laws of New York 2021 allows people on parole to vote. In 2023, the law was further amended to require the Department of Corrections to notify people of their right to vote. Voting After Incarceration Guidelines: The Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS) must provide a written notice of voting rights restoration and a voter registration form to individuals upon release.	1. You can register to vote once you are released. People on parole can vote, and the Department of Corrections should give you information about voting as part of reentry. 2. If your registration is challenged, reach out to the organization Legal Action Center to help verify that your record was updated following the state’s recent legislative changes.
North Dakota	North Dakota Voter Guide : No affirmative duty to notify. Standard discharge paperwork is sufficient notice.	1. Voting rights are restored after incarceration. You can register as soon as you are released. 2. North Dakota requires a state ID to vote, ensure you have the required North Dakota state ID, which must show a residential address. You may need to acquire one before you register.

Restoration Upon Release from Prison (23 States)

Ohio	There is no requirement for the Department of Corrections or Social Services to notify individuals that their voting rights have been restored. Discharge paperwork serves as sufficient notice.	1. Voting rights are restored after incarceration. You can register as soon as you are released. 2. You can use the Ohio Justice & Policy Center for “Clean Slate” services to ensure your public record accurately reflects your eligibility.
Oregon	There is no requirement for the Department of Corrections or Social Services to notify individuals that their voting rights have been restored. Discharge paperwork serves as sufficient notice.	1. Voting rights are restored after incarceration. You can register as soon as you are released. 2. Since Oregon is a vote-by-mail state, immediately update your address with the Secretary of State upon release to ensure your ballot reaches you.
Pennsylvania	There is no requirement for the Department of Corrections or Social Services to notify individuals that their voting rights have been restored. Discharge paperwork serves as sufficient notice. The Department of Corrections is a designated voter registration agency and must make information and forms available upon request. § 7.932.	1. Voting rights are restored after incarceration. You can register as soon as you are released. 2. Check out materials from the organization Committee of Seventy to learn about local ballot issues upon return to the community.
Rhode Island	R.I. Gen. Laws § 17-9.2-3, 100-20-00-2 RHODE ISLAND RESTORATION OF VOTING RIGHTS ACT OF 2006 (RIRVRA) : The Department of Corrections must provide written notification of voting eligibility, a registration and declination form, and provide assistance if requested.	1. Voting rights are restored after incarceration. You can register as soon as you are released. 2. Look into joining the organization Common Cause RI to support legislation that would allow for better ballot access for those still in the “pre-trial” phase in jails.
Utah	There is no requirement for the Department of Corrections or Social Services to notify individuals that their voting rights have been restored. Discharge paperwork serves as sufficient notice.	1. Voting rights are restored after incarceration. You can register as soon as you are released. 2. You can use the Lt. Governor’s online portal to verify that your record has been cleared for registration within 30 days of release.
Washington	Rev. Code (RCW) : The Department of Corrections notify individuals in writing of their restored voting rights at the time of release and to provide a registration form with written instructions of how to fill and file the form.	1. Voting rights are restored after incarceration. You can register as soon as you are released. 2. Look into joining the organization Civil Survival to help other returning citizens navigate the administrative aspects of civil rights restoration.

C. Restoration Upon Completion of Parole or Probation

Fifteen states restore voting rights upon completion of parole and probation. However, for those living in these states, disenfranchisement can become an indefinite reality. An estimated 2 million people remain disenfranchised, three out of every four people who cannot vote due to a felony conviction are living in their communities, either still under probation or parole, or having completed supervision entirely.¹ The disenfranchisement, in other words, isn't happening in prisons. It's happening on the outside, to people who are already working, paying taxes, and raising families.

Part of the problem is that “completion” is rarely a single, verifiable date. Supervision periods are routinely extended for technical violations or missed check-ins, so the end date given at sentencing may not match when probation or parole actually concludes. There are also exceptions carved out for specific charges. People serving multiple concurrent or consecutive terms may not know which is still active, and interstate transfers add further confusion, since discharge paperwork doesn't always follow someone who has moved. Eligibility becomes a moving target and people often don't know they're ineligible until they're turned away at registration, or worse, register anyway and risk prosecution. Once eligible, many voters are not made aware that their rights have been restored, and instead assume their disenfranchisement is permanent.

Despite these very real barriers, there are people and organizations working tirelessly to restore the voting rights of individuals impacted by incarceration. ML Smith from Missouri is one of those advocates.

1

Nicole Porter and Jean Chung, [“Voting Rights in the Era of Mass Incarceration: A Primer.”](#) The Sentencing Project (2024)



A Hard Fought Victory in Missouri – ML Smith

ML Smith is an advocate for the rights of incarcerated people, both on the inside and after release, who has championed voting rights expansion in Missouri. Her organization, [Missouri Justice Coalition](#), was a driving force behind HB 1871 which restores voting rights to individuals on parole for non-violent felony convictions. The bill, which was signed into law on August 28, 2026, was a significant step towards voter reenfranchisement, but Smith's fight is far from over.

HB 1871 was introduced several years ago by a junior state representative in the first year of her first term. Her inspiration behind the bill came from an interaction with a constituent:

“She knocked on the door of a formerly incarcerated man. When she talked about voting for her in the election, he was upset because he had been disenfranchised and he felt like he wasn’t a total member of his community, so when she came to his door, he was mad. He said: ‘I can’t vote and that makes me feel bad that I’m not really reintegrating my community.’ She promised that if she was elected, she would make sure that this changes. And she did.”

Once the bill was introduced, a coalition of Missouri civil rights organizations joined together to champion the bill and spent several years meeting with representatives, advising on the bill’s language, and negotiating the terms of the bill. Smith admits that HB 1871 is far from comprehensive, and that restoration for individuals with violent felony convictions was one of the sacrifices to ensure the bills passage, but she is committed to continuing the fight for total reenfranchisement:

“I know that some people are going to be disappointed that we didn’t get a total win, and we didn’t get everything we asked for this first time, but real change takes time. Sometimes you get a little piece, and then you keep coming back and trying to get another piece, and another piece, and another piece, so it may take a while, right? We’re going to keep building our coalition, bringing in more impacted people, and having conversations around how everybody needs to be fully reintegrated into society, regardless of the mistakes that they made in their life.”

Restoration Upon Completion of Parole or Probation (15 States)

	Automatic Restoration	Exceptions to Automatic Restoration:	Steps to Consider Taking
Alaska	Voting rights are automatically restored for all felony convictions. Individuals convicted of crimes of “moral turpitude” (defined in 12 AK Admin Code 79.910) lose their right to vote for the duration of their sentence. Voting rights are restored after the full completion of sentence (incarceration, parole, probation). (Alaska Stat. § 15.05.030) <i>*if incarcerated for a crime not enumerated in 12 AK Admin Code 79.910, you may vote via an absentee ballot.¹</i>		Discharge papers serve as notice of restoration. Make sure you receive one from the Department of Corrections. Once received, register to vote using the standard state application (online, mail, or in person). Keep your official final discharge paperwork on hand in case the local registry county computer isn’t updated yet. If you are a member of a Tribe, use tribal resources to verify that local election officials are honoring your restoration status.

Restoration Upon Completion of Parole or Probation (15 States)

Delaware	Voting rights are automatically restored upon completion of sentence, including prison time, parole, and supervision. (Del. Code tit. 15, § 6102). Qualifying Felonies: “standard felonies” (i.e. theft, drug crimes, burglary).	Disqualifying Felonies: Individuals convicted of murder or manslaughter, felony sexual offenses, felony bribery or public corruption, or treason must receive a gubernatorial pardon. Petitions for pardon must be submitted 3 to 5 years <i>after</i> the completion of the sentence to the Delaware Board of Pardons, and the applicant must undergo a full hearing. (Del Cons. Art. V, § 2). Election Violations: individuals convicted of a felony election offense or misdemeanor election law violation face a 10-year delay before rights are restored. (Del Cons. Art. V, § 7).	There is no requirement for notification of restoration. Register using the standard process (online, in person, by mail). Upon submission of your application to register, election officials will conduct a background check through the Criminal Justice Information System (CJIS) to confirm eligibility. If eligible, you will be mailed a standard voter registration card confirming your polling place. Contact the Delaware Center for Justice to assist with the pardon application process.
Idaho	Voting rights are automatically restored following completion of full sentence (incarceration, probation, and parole). (ID Code § 18-310)	Individuals convicted of treason in any state or jurisdiction shall not be allowed to register and vote in Idaho, even upon final discharge. (ID HB 698).	Discharge papers serve as notice of restoration. Once received, you can register to vote using the standard state application (online, mail, or in person at the County Clerk’s Office or voting centers). Keep your official final discharge paperwork on hand in case the local registry county computer isn’t updated yet. You can check Idaho’s “iCourt” system to ensure your case status is listed as “closed” and “discharged” before attempting to register.

Restoration Upon Completion of Parole or Probation (15 States)

Iowa	Voting rights are automatically restored following completion of full sentence (incarceration, probation, and parole). (Iowa Executive Order 7).	Individuals convicted under Chapter 707 of the Iowa Code (murder, manslaughter, and felony homicide) must submit an individual Application for Restoration of Voting Rights to the Governor's Office. Iowa Legal Aid can provide assistance for this individual application process. <i>*applicants must have completely paid off all court costs, fines, and victim restitution, or be on an approved court payment plan.</i>	There is no requirement to provide notice upon restoration. To check status, you may contact the Iowa Department of Corrections or check the Secretary of State's website. Register to vote using the standard state application (online, mail, or in person).
Kansas	Voting rights are automatically restored following completion of full sentence (incarceration, probation, and parole) and payment of associated fines and fees. (Kan. Stat. Ann. § 21-6613) <i>*If fines/fees have been transferred to civil debt collection, you may be eligible to vote despite outstanding debt.²</i>	Voting rights are automatically restored for all felony convictions.	Discharge papers serve as notice of restoration. Once received, you register to vote using the standard state application (online, mail, or in person). Keep your official final discharge paperwork on hand in case the local registry county computer isn't updated yet.

Restoration Upon Completion of Parole or Probation (15 States)

Kentucky	Voting rights are automatically restored for all individuals convicted of non-violent felonies upon completion of prison time, probation, and parole. (Executive Order 2019-003). <i>*This does not apply if you were convicted in federal court, or another state court, in which case you do not have voting rights.</i>	Individuals convicted of the following crimes must apply for a gubernatorial pardon to restore their rights: Executive Order 2019-003 • Treason; • Bribery in an election; • A violent offense defined in KRS 439.3401; • Any offense under KRS Chapter 507 or KRS Chapter 507A; • Any assault, as defined in KRS 508.020 or KRS 508.040, • Strangulation in the first degree, as defined in KRS 508.170; • Human trafficking, as defined in KRS 529.100; • Any felony conviction in another state or in the federal system. <i>*applicants must have completely paid off all court costs, fines, and victim restitution, or be on an approved court payment plan.</i>	Discharge papers serve as notice of restoration. You may check your status at CivilRightsRestoration.ky.gov Register to vote using the standard state application (online, mail, or in person). Keep your official final discharge paperwork on hand in case the local registry county computer isn't updated yet.
Louisiana	If Incarcerated or on Short-Term Probation/Parole: rights are automatically restored following the completion of sentence. (La. R.S. 18:102) If on Long-Term Probation/Parole: voting rights are restored while on felony probation or parole if five years have elapsed since release from incarceration (prison or jail). Voting rights are never suspended if the individual was not incarcerated (prison or jail). (La. R.S. 18:102)	Individuals convicted of election-related felonies cannot have their rights restored until full completion of their sentence. The 5-year rule does not apply. (La. R.S. 18:102(A)(1)(c))	There is no requirement to provide notice upon restoration. You should request a Voter Rights Certificate from the Division of Probation and Parole to confirm your eligibility. If Previously Registered:³ you must submit a paper voter registration application and your voter rights certificate. If Not Previously Registered: Register online or with standard paper application. You do not need to submit your voter rights certificate. Connect with Voice of the Experienced (VOTE) – an organization led by formerly incarcerated people – for assistance with registration forms.

Restoration Upon Completion of Parole or Probation (15 States)

Louisiana	If Incarcerated or on Short-Term Probation/Parole: rights are automatically restored following the completion of sentence. (La. R.S. 18:102) If on Long-Term Probation/Parole: voting rights are restored while on felony probation or parole if five years have elapsed since release from incarceration (prison or jail). Voting rights are never suspended if the individual was not incarcerated (prison or jail). (La. R.S. 18:102)	Individuals convicted of election-related felonies cannot have their rights restored until full completion of their sentence. The 5-year rule does not apply. (La. R.S. 18:102(A)(1)(c))	There is no requirement to provide notice upon restoration. You should request a Voter Rights Certificate from the Division of Probation and Parole to confirm your eligibility. If Previously Registered:⁴ you must submit a paper voter registration application and your voter rights certificate. If Not Previously Registered: Register online or with standard paper application. You do not need to submit your voter rights certificate. Connect with Voice of the Experienced (VOTE) – an organization led by formerly incarcerated people – for assistance with registration forms.
Missouri	Voting rights are automatically restored following completion of full sentence (incarceration, probation, and parole). (Mo. Rev. Stat. § 115.133.2). <i>*As of August 28, 2026, individuals convicted of non-violent felonies currently on probation or parole are eligible to vote. (HB 1871).</i>	Individuals with felony (or misdemeanor) conviction for voting or election fraud must apply for a gubernatorial pardon.⁵	Discharge papers serve as notice of restoration. You can request a “Letter of Completion” from your parole or probation officer. Register to vote using the standard state application (online, mail, or in person). Keep your official final discharge paperwork on hand in case the local registry county computer isn’t updated yet.
Nebraska	Voting rights are automatically restored following completion of full sentence (incarceration, probation, and parole). (Nebraska Revised Statute 32-313)	Individuals convicted of treason under Nebraska or federal law must apply for a pardon from the state Board of Pardons. (Nebraska Revised Statute 32-313)	Discharge papers serve as notice of restoration. Register to vote using the standard state application (online, mail, or in person). Keep your official final discharge paperwork on hand in case the local registry county computer isn’t updated yet. If you have issues with your name being removed from the state’s “ineligible” list once your sentence is finalized, contact Civic Nebraska

⁴ Madeline Greenberg, [“Litigation Louisiana Federal Court Upholds Louisiana Felony Re-Enfranchisement Policy, But Allows Lawsuit To Continue,”](#) Democracy Docket (2024).

⁵ [“Felon Voter Information,”](#) St. Louis Government.

Restoration Upon Completion of Parole or Probation (15 States)

North Carolina	Voting rights are automatically restored following completion of full sentence (incarceration, probation, and parole). (N.C. Gen. Stat. 13-1).	Voting rights are automatically restored for all felony convictions.	Register to vote using the mail-in application. *Registering to vote before the completion of your sentence is a felony in North Carolina. Request your Certificate of Restoration of Forfeited Rights of Citizenship from your releasing officer (N.C. Gen. Stat. 13-2) to serve as proof of eligibility.
Oklahoma	Voting rights are automatically restored following completion of full sentence (incarceration, probation, and parole). (OK HB 4113).	Voting rights are automatically restored for all felony convictions.	Discharge papers serve as notice of restoration. Register to vote using the standard state application (online, mail, or in person). Keep your official final discharge paperwork on hand in case the local registry county computer isn't updated yet.
South Carolina	Voting rights are automatically restored following completion of full sentence (incarceration, probation, and parole). (S.C. Code § 7-5-120(B)).	Voting rights are automatically restored for all felony convictions.	Discharge papers serve as notice of restoration. You can register to vote using the standard state application (online, mail, or in person). Keep your official final discharge paperwork on hand in case the local registry county computer isn't updated yet. You can contact SC Appleseed if you encounter delays in the state's "Voter Registration and Election System" (VRES) updating your status.

Restoration Upon Completion of Parole or Probation (15 States)

West Virginia	Voting rights are automatically restored following completion of full sentence (incarceration, probation, and parole). (W. Va. Code § 3-1-3).	Voting rights are automatically restored for all felony convictions. (W. Va. Code § 3-1-3).	Discharge papers serve as notice of restoration. Register to vote using the standard state application (online, mail, or in person). Keep your official final discharge paperwork on hand in case the local registry county computer isn't updated yet. You can follow up with your county clerk to ensure your name has been moved from the "inactive" or "ineligible" rolls once you are released.
Wisconsin	Voting rights are automatically restored following completion of full sentence (incarceration, probation, and parole). (WI Stat. § 304.078 (3)).	Individuals convicted of treason or bribery (felony or misdemeanor) must apply for a gubernatorial pardon.	The Department of Corrections or Probation and Parole must provide paper notification that rights have been restored. (WI Stat. § 304.078 (3)). Register to vote using the standard state application (online, mail, or in person). Keep your official final discharge paperwork on hand in case the local registry county computer isn't updated yet.
Wyoming	Individuals with a first, non-violent, conviction (those with multiple convictions arising from one occurrence included) are eligible for automatic restoration of voting rights upon completion of sentence and payment of all fees and fines (including victim restitution). (WY Stat § 7-13-105(b)).	Individuals convicted of a violent felony (WY Stat § 6-1-104(a)(xii)) or multiple, separate felonies (WY Stat § 7-13-105) must apply for a gubernatorial pardon.	The Department of Corrections will issue a Certification of Restoration of Rights upon completion of sentence. <i>*individuals convicted before January 1, 2010 must submit a written request for a certificate of restoration of voting rights.</i> Once received, you register to vote using the standard state application (by mail or in person). You can request a Restoration of Rights Certificate from the department of corrections by writing: <i>Wyoming Department of Corrections</i> <i>Attn: Field Services Administrator</i> <i>1934 Wyott Drive, Suite 100</i> <i>Cheyenne, WY 82002</i> doc-restorationofrights@wyo.gov

D. Restoration Upon Completion of Parole, Probation, and Payment of Fees

In these 7 states, restoring your voting rights is contingent upon the completion of your sentence and the payment of all fines and fees. In these states, financial barriers often result in the indefinite, if not permanent, loss of voting rights for individuals with felony convictions, and disproportionately affect individuals from low income backgrounds. While some states, like **Georgia**, require only that the original court ordered fees be paid, others, like **Florida**, require that all be paid, including late fees and accrued interest resulting from an inability to pay the initial costs (often termed “poverty penalties”).⁶ These requirements have been heavily contested by voting rights groups, who have called it a “wealth-test” and criticized their discriminatory effects.

A 2020 survey conducted in **Florida** found that of the over 1 million Floridians who otherwise met the voting eligibility requirement (had completed supervision, and were not convicted of a disqualifying crime), 77% still owed court costs which barred them from registering to vote.⁷ In response, organizations, such as Free Our Vote,⁸ emerged to help disenfranchised voters pay off their court debts and retain their voting rights, paying off the court debt of around 500,000 Floridians during their 2020 outreach campaign.⁹

Restoration Upon Completion of Parole, Probation, and Payment of Fees (7 States)			
	Automatic Restoration	Exceptions to Automatic Restoration:	Steps to Consider Taking
Alabama	Voting rights are restored after the full completion of sentence (incarceration, parole, probation) and if victim restitution is paid in full. (Ala. Code § 15-22-36.1)	Restoration unavailable for those who committed crimes of “ moral turpitude ” (murder, manslaughter, rape, etc.). Refer to AL H 282 for complete list. (Ala. Code § 15-22-36.1) If your crime is on the list, you must apply for a Certificate of Eligibility to Register to Vote (CERV) via the Alabama Bureau of Pardons and Parole once your sentence is complete and fines are paid.	For assistance with voting registration or CERV application, connect with the Alabama Election Protection Network—their staff has lived experience navigating this specific bureaucracy.

6 Lloyd Dunkleberger [“Opening Testimony In Voting-Rights Trial Includes Evidence Of Racial Disparity, Administrative Roadblocks,”](#) Florida Phoenix (2020)

7 Ibid.

8 Free Our Vote now serves individuals in Florida, Georgia, Virginia, Kansas, Arizona and Washington.

9 Gary E. Frank, [“The Debt Relief Program Restoring Voting Rights for People with Felony Convictions,”](#) Triple Pundit (2024).

Restoration Upon Completion of Parole, Probation, and Payment of Fees (7 States)

Arizona	Individuals with a single conviction are eligible for automatic restoration of voting rights upon completion of sentence and payment of all fees and fines (including victim restitution). (Ariz. Rev. Stat. § 13-907).	Multiple Convictions: must file a petition to the court requesting restoration of rights. (Those sentenced to time in prison must wait 2 years after release to file their petition in court). (Ariz. Rev. Stat. § 13-907).	Register to vote using the standard state application (online, mail, or in person). Keep your official final discharge paperwork on hand in case the local registry county computer isn't updated yet. You can check the "iCourt" system or contact the Clerk of the Superior Court to ensure your "final discharge" is officially entered; without this entry, the Secretary of State's system may still show you as ineligible.
Arkansas	Voting rights are automatically restored upon completion of sentence (including probation and parole) and payment of ALL court fines, fees, and victim restitution. (AR Con. Amend. 51, § 11)	Voting rights are automatically restored for all felony convictions.	To register, you must provide the county clerk with proof of discharge from probation or parole, payment of all fees, court costs, fines, and restitution. You will then be permitted to register at the county clerk. You can request a "Certified Payoff Statement" from the court clerk where you were convicted. You can also request a letter from your probation parole officer stating you have completed all terms. Physically bring these documents when registering to vote.
Florida	Voting rights are restored upon completion of sentence (including imprisonment, probation, fulfillment of any terms ordered by the court, and full payment of fines, fees, and restitution costs). You must fulfill "Legal Financial Obligations" (LFOs). (Flor. Stat. §98.0751).	Individuals convicted of murder and felony sexual offenses are not eligible for automatic restoration and must apply for executive clemency directly to the Florida Board of Executive Clemency.	There is no requirement for notification of rights restoration nor full payment of fees. To confirm completion of sentence and eligibility, you may submit a Felon Eligibility Opinion Request Form to the Division of Elections, after which they will have 90 days to conduct a review and mail you an official, legally binding Advisory Opinion. After which, you may register using the standard registration system. The Florida Rights Restoration Coalition Fund helps formerly incarcerated people pay outstanding fines and fees so that they can register to vote. <i>*Registering with outstanding debt can result in criminal charges.</i>

Restoration Upon Completion of Parole, Probation, and Payment of Fees (7 States)

Georgia	Rights are restored automatically after completing the entire sentence (prison, parole, probation), but all court-ordered fines must be paid in full before you can register. (Ga. Code Ann. § 21-2-216) <i>*Restitution or un-adjudicated fees do not bar you from registering.</i>	Voting rights are automatically restored for all felony convictions.	Register to vote using the standard state application (online, mail, or in person). You may request a certificate of completion of sentence from the Department of Community Supervision to confirm and serve as proof of eligibility. Registering to vote while knowing you are ineligible is a felony. (GA Code § 21-2-561). *If your sentencing occurred under the First Offender Act, your civil rights might remain fully intact. You should reach out to the Georgia Justice Project to confirm whether your eligibility was ever suspended.
South Dakota	Voting rights are automatically restored upon completion of sentence (including probation and parole) and payment of ALL court fines, fees, and victims restitution. (SDCL § 12-4-18; SDCL § 23A-27-25.6).	Voting rights are automatically restored for all felony convictions.	Discharge papers serve as notice of restoration. Once received you may register to vote (South Dakota only allows paper registration). South Dakota requires proof of citizenship (birth certificate, passport, or South Dakota Drivers License). (SB 175). If you are a member of a tribal nation, use South Dakota Voices for Peace to help navigate state registration requirements from tribal lands.
Texas	Voting rights are automatically restored upon completion of sentence (including probation and parole) and payment of ALL court fines and fees. (Texas Election Code § 11.002; <i>Burg v. State</i>, 592 S.W.3d 444, 451 (Tex. Crim. App. 2020))¹⁰	Voting rights are automatically restored for all felony convictions. (Texas Election Code § 11.002).	There is no requirement for notification of restoration nor full payment of fees. You should request a Certificate of Discharge from your supervision officer to confirm your eligibility. Voting before you are eligible is considered a felony, and Texas has a history of prosecuting such crimes. (Texas Election Code § 64.012)

E. Petition Based Restorations

Most restrictive are the three states that only restore rights via individual petitions to the court, the governor, or the legislature. While several states still retain pardon or court order requirements for certain crimes, only **Mississippi**, **Tennessee**, and **Virginia** require such extensive measures for the majority of felony convictions.

In **Virginia**, the state Constitution does not allow for the automatic restoration of voting rights, instead it requires individuals with felony convictions to apply for a gubernatorial pardon following full completion of their sentence (including probation). Several Virginia Governors have attempted to simplify the restoration process, including then-Governor Terry McAuliffe who issued an executive order to proactively restore voting rights for eligible individuals (206,000 Virginians). These efforts have met significant legal and political pushback. McAuliffe's executive order was overturned by the VA Supreme Court in *Howell v. McAuliffe*, a decision which nullified all the voter registrations that followed the mass restoration, and required the Governor to issue a separate order for each request to be accompanied by a notice of restoration.¹¹

These efforts have been stymied by the state's restrictive constitution which has served as the foundation for any legal and political pushback to these executive orders. However, the upcoming **2026 ballot** will feature a proposed constitutional amendment that, if approved, would automatically restore voting rights upon release from prison.¹² Below is a chart outlining the laws within these three states and steps you can consider taking.

Mississippi		
Who loses their rights?	Restoration Process:	Registration Process:
Individuals convicted of a crime enumerated in Miss. Const. Ann. Art. 12, § 241 (murder, rape, bribery, theft, arson, obtaining money or goods under false pretense, perjury, forgery, embezzlement or bigamy) lose their right to vote. <i>*if you are incarcerated for a non-enumerated crime, you may retain your right to vote while incarcerated.</i>	If the right to vote has been lost, it can be restored through 2 processes: 3. two-thirds vote of all members elected to both the House of Representatives and the Senate. Miss. Const. Ann. Art. 12, § 253. 4. A full gubernatorial pardon. Polk v. State, 150 So. 3d 967	Register to vote using the standard state application (online, mail, or in person). Keep your official final discharge paperwork on hand in case the local registry county computer isn't updated yet. Reach out to the Mississippi Center for Justice to verify your eligibility status. If your conviction is enumerated as disqualifying, their advocates can assist in drafting a private legislative bill and provide guidance through the arduous state restoration process.

¹¹ If your conviction is on appeal, you may retain your voting rights in Texas. See Section IV, Voting in Jail or on Appeal, for more information.

¹² Ibid.

Tennessee		
Restoration Process	Exceptions to Restoration	Registration Process
Individuals not convicted of a disqualifying felony may have their rights restored by court order or Gubernatorial pardon. (Secretary of State Policy Memo). <i>*If convicted on or before May 17, 1981 you only need to answer the appropriate question on the voter registration form.</i>	Individuals Convicted of the following crimes are ineligible for voter restoration. Convicted Between July 1, 1986, and June 30, 1996: First-degree murder, aggravated rape, treason, or voter fraud Convicted Between July 1, 1996, and June 30, 2006: Murder, rape, treason, or voter fraud Convicted On or after July 1, 2006: Murder, rape, treason, voter fraud, certain felonies involving bribery, misconduct involving public officials and employees, or interference with government operations, and sexual offenses or violent sexual offenses that are felonies where the victim was a minor.	Individuals who have received a court order or were convicted prior to May 17, 1981 can register using the standard voting registration application.

Virginia		
Restoration Process	Exceptions to Restoration	Registration Process
Anyone convicted of a felony must submit an application for restoration to the Governor, who has total discretion to approve or deny.	While all felonies result in the same lifetime disenfranchisement and require the same restoration application, Governors have historically favored applicants with non-violent convictions.	Register to vote using the standard state application (online, mail, or in person). Keep your official final discharge paperwork on hand in case the local registry county computer isn't updated yet.

IV. Voting in Jail or on Appeal

Under the 14th amendment, you retain the right to vote until you are convicted of a felony. This means that people facing pending charges, whether in jail or out, are still eligible to vote. Some jails promote active voter outreach, including registration parties and voting day events, while voters in other jails may need to be proactive and resourceful to secure and mail their ballot in time for their election day.

In Texas, you maintain the right to vote until your conviction is final. The secretary of state's office has confirmed that a "conviction on appeal is not considered a final felony conviction." Therefore, individuals may retain their voter rights for the months or years that they are in prison and in the process of exhausting their direct appeals.

Though they legally retain this right, exercising it is difficult. Many lawyers are unaware that their clients may have this right and so do not inform them, there

is no outreach to eligible voters, and those who wish to exercise their right must navigate the logistical challenges that incarceration creates.

Eligible voters should register in the county they lived in before they were incarcerated, and may vote by mail.

To request a mail-in ballot, eligible voters may submit a mail-in ballot application noting that they are "confined in jail or involuntary civil confinement" as the reason for voting by mail. If you cannot access a mail-in ballot application you may send a signed request letter containing your name, residential address (pre-incarceration), personal identification number/last four digits of your social security number, your facility mailing address, and an explanation of grounds for voting by mail. Applications should be mailed to your county of residence's early voting clerk.

V. Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. Before reading this module, what did voting mean to you?

2. What issue affecting you, your family, or your community matters most to you right now?

3. Which public officials, agencies, laws, or budgets have power over that issue?

4. What are the limits of voting as a strategy? What can voting accomplish when it is connected to organizing?

5. What information would someone need before they could make an informed decision about voting?

6. How can jailhouse lawyers help people restore and use their civic rights without pressuring them?

7. If you cannot currently vote, who are five people on the outside you could educate about an issue that matters to your community?

8. What would a more inclusive democracy look and feel like to you?

VI. Agencies and Organizations that Can Assist with Voting

There are many government agencies and not-for-profit organizations established to protect the right to vote. A few national organizations that provide specialized guidance on voting rights restoration are:

- [Campaign Legal Center](#): Offers state-specific tools like “Restore Your Vote”.
- [The Sentencing Project](#): Provides research and advocacy for expanding voting rights.
- [Brennan Center for Justice](#): Offers legal analysis and tracking of state-level law changes.

State	Key Agency & Organizational Resources
Alabama	Agencies • State Agency Alabama Secretary of State; <i>P.O. Box 5616</i> <i>Montgomery, AL 36103-5616</i> • Alabama Bureau of Pardons and Paroles Organizations • Greater Birmingham Ministries • Legal Services Alabama • ACLU of Alabama • Alabama Election Protection Network <i>403 West Powell Street</i> <i>Dothan, AL 36303</i> • The Ordinary People Society (TOPS) <i>403 West Powell Street</i> <i>Dothan, AL 36303</i> • Campaign Legal Center (Restore Your Vote) • Alabama Senate passes bill easing voting rights restoration for those convicted of felonies
Alaska	Agencies • Alaska Division of Elections <i>P.O. Box 110017</i> <i>Juneau, AK 99811-0017</i> Organizations • ACLU Alaska <i>P.O. Box 90788</i> <i>Anchorage, AK 99509</i> • Native American Rights Fund • Get Out the Native Vote

Arizona	Agencies • Arizona Secretary of State Secretary of State / Elections 1700 W. Washington, 7th Floor Phoenix, AZ 85007-2888 Organizations • Arizona Justice Project 4001 N. 3rd St., Suite 401 Phoenix, AZ 85012 • LUCHA Arizona • ACLU of Arizona • Restore Your Vote • Arizona Coalition for Change • Arizona Coalition to End Jail Based Disenfranchise • Voting Rights Restoration
Arkansas	Agencies • Arkansas Secretary of State Secretary of State, Voter Services P.O. Box 8111 Little Rock, AR 72203-8111 Organizations • Arkansas Public Policy Panel 1308 W. 2nd St. Little Rock, AR 72201 • Legal Aid of Arkansas • The Washitaw Foothills Youth Media Arts & Literacy Collective • Arkansas Voting Integrity Initiative • ACLU Arkansas
California	Agencies • California Secretary of State Elections Division 1500 11th Street, 5th Floor Sacramento, CA 95814 Organizations • Organizations League of Women Voters California • Initiate Justice • ACLU California • Center on Juvenile & Criminal Justice • Alameda County Public Defender • Initiate Justice • CA Voters Resource • Legal Services for Prisoners with Children 4400 Market Street Oakland, CA 94608 • All of Us or None

Colorado	Agencies • Colorado Secretary of State 1700 Broadway, Suite 550 Denver, CO 80290 Organizations • Colorado Criminal Justice Reform Coalition • Colorado State Public Defender • ACLU • Voting Rights Restoration • Center for Tech and Civic Life • Remerg P.O. Box 18463 Denver, CO 80218
Connecticut	Agencies • Secretary of the State Elections Division P.O. Box 150470 Hartford, CT 06115-0470 Organizations • Connecticut Voting Rights Project • Prison Fellowship • The Sentencing Project • ACLU ACLU of Connecticut P.O. Box 230178 Hartford, CT 06123 • 211 Connecticut • Community Partners In Action • Free Our Vote • Common Cause Connecticut
Delaware	Agencies • State of Delaware Department of Elections Office of the State Election Commissioner 905 S. Governors Ave., Suite 170 Dover, DE 19904 Organizations • Delaware Center for Justice 100 W. 10th Street, Suite 905 Wilmington, DE 19801 • ACLU • Delaware Center for Justice • Prison Fellowship

Florida	Agencies • Florida Division of Elections R.A. Gray Building 500 South Bronough St., Room 316 Tallahassee, FL 32399-0250 • Manatee County Supervisor of Elections Organizations • Florida Rights Restoration Coalition P.O. Box 618147 Orlando, FL 32861 • Campaign Legal Center • Southern Poverty Law Center • League of Women Voters • Ballot Pedia • All Voting Is Local (Florida)
Georgia	Agencies • Georgia Secretary of State Elections Division 2 Martin Luther King Jr. Drive Suite 802, Floyd West Tower Atlanta, GA 30334 Organizations • Georgia Justice Project 438 Edgewood Ave. SE Atlanta, GA 30312 • Southern Center for Human Rights • NewLife Second Chance Outreach, Inc • ATL Community Support Project • Vote Riders • All Voting is Local (Georgia)
Hawaii	Agencies • State of Hawaii Office of Elections 802 Lehua Avenue Pearl City, HI 96782 Organizations • ACLU Hawaii P.O. Box 3410 Honolulu, HI 96801 • Honolulu Civil Beat • US Vote Foundation • APIAVOTE

Idaho	Agencies • Idaho Secretary of State <i>P.O. Box 83720</i> <i>Boise, ID 83720-0080</i> Organizations • Idaho Legal Aid <i>1447 S. Tyrell Lane</i> <i>Boise, ID 83706</i> • Idaho Justice Project • ACLU Idaho
Illinois	Agencies • Illinois State Board of Elections <i>2329 S. MacArthur Boulevard</i> <i>Springfield, IL 62704</i> Organizations • Chicago Votes <i>1006 S. Michigan Ave., Suite 606</i> <i>Chicago, IL 60605</i> • Restore Justice • ACLU Illinois • Action Network • League of Women Voters • Partners for Justice • Center for Civic Engagement
Indiana	Agencies • Indiana Secretary of State <i>Indiana Election Division</i> <i>Office of the Secretary of State</i> <i>302 West Washington Street, Room E204</i> <i>Indianapolis, IN 46204</i> • Indiana Legal Services: Home <i>1200 Madison Ave., Suite 300</i> <i>Indianapolis, IN 46225</i> Organizations • ACLU of Indiana • Count Us In

Iowa	Agencies • Iowa Secretary of State Elections Division Lucas Building, First Floor 321 E. 12th Street Des Moines, IA 50319 Organization • Iowa Legal Aid 606 Walnut Street, 25th Floor Des Moines, IA 50309 • Voting Rights Restoration Efforts in Iowa • Partner Organizations – Iowa Justice Action Network • ACLU Iowa
Kansas	Agencies • Kansas Secretary of State Docking State Office Building 915 SW Harrison Street Topeka, KS 66612-1594 Organization • Kansas Appleseed Center for Law and Justice, Inc. • RESTORE MY VOTE: Voting after a felony in Kansas • Registering to Vote After Completing Felony Sentence • ACLU Kansas P.O. Box 13048 Overland Park, KS 66282
Kentucky	Agencies • Kentucky State Board of Elections 140 Walnut Street Frankfort, KY 40601-3240 Organizations • ACLU: Smart Justice Advocates • Our Platform Kentuckians For The Commonwealth P.O. Box 1450 London, KY 40743 • Kentucky Jail & Post-Release Voting Programs & Resources • Bolts: Kentucky Activists Step In to Deliver on the Promise of Voting

Louisiana	Agencies • Louisiana Secretary of State Attn: Elections Division P.O. Box 94125 Baton Rouge, LA 70804-9125 Organizations • Voice of the Experienced: VOTE 4930 Washington Ave., Suite D New Orleans, LA 70125 • Fighting for the Right to Vote in Louisiana
Maine	Agencies • Maine Secretary of State Maine Secretary of State 111 Sewall St. (101 State House Station), Augusta, ME 04333 Organization • League of Women Voters of Maine P.O. Box 18187 Portland, ME 04112 • About – MPAC – Maine Prisoner Advocacy Coalition
Maryland	Agencies • Maryland State Board of Elections • Restoration of Voting Rights – Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services 6776 Reisterstown Road Baltimore, MD 21215 6852 4th Street Sykesville, MD 21784 Organizations • ACLU Maryland – Voter Empowerment • Nonpartisan Voting Rights Organizations Unite to Provide • Registering Voters at The County Jail: A Step Toward • Defending Democracy in Maryland • VOTING RIGHT mdjusticeproject • Out For Justice P.O. Box 33468, Baltimore, MD 21218

Massachusetts	Agencies • Secretary of the Commonwealth Elections Division, Room 1705 1 Ashburton Place Boston, MA 02108 • Protecting Voting Rights for Incarcerated People Organizations • ACLU of Massachusetts One Center Plaza, Suite 850 Boston, MA 02108 • EDC to Unlock Democracy • 60+ Organizations Support Legislation to Protect Voting • Voting Resources • EDC to Unlock Democracy • Ballots Over Bars
Michigan	Agencies • Michigan Secretary of State Bureau of Elections P.O. Box 20126 Lansing, MI 48901-0726 Note: registration forms normally go to your city or township clerk. Organizations • Michigan Voices 2727 2nd Ave., Suite 109 Detroit, MI 48201
Minnesota	Agencies • Voting Rights Restored to Formerly Incarcerated Minnesotans Office of the Minnesota Secretary of State Elections Division Veterans Service Building, Suite 210 20 W. 12th Street Saint Paul, MN 55155 Organizations • RESTORE THE VOTE MN • Justice Impact Individuals Voting • Values • Bush Foundation • ACLU of Minnesota P.O. Box 14720 Minneapolis, MN 55414

Mississippi	Agencies • Mississippi Secretary of State <i>P.O. Box 136</i> <i>Jackson, MS 39205-0136</i> Organizations • Mississippi Center for Justice <i>P.O. Box 1023</i> <i>Jackson, MS 39215-1023</i> • Advancement Project • U.S. Vote Foundation • America's Black Holocaust Museum • Southern Poverty Law Center • The Marshall Project • The Sentencing Project
Missouri	Agencies • Missouri Secretary of State <i>P.O. Box 1767</i> <i>Jefferson City, MO 65102-1767</i> Organizations • Missouri Appleseed <i>100 N. Tucker Blvd., Room 840</i> <i>St. Louis, MO 63101</i> • Missouri Voter Protection Coalition • Empower Missouri • ACLU of Missouri
Montana	Agencies • Department of Justice • Montana Secretary of State <i>Secretary of State's Office</i> <i>P.O. Box 202801</i> <i>Helena, MT 59620-2801</i> <i>Note: the state advises mailing to your county election office instead.</i> Organizations • ACLU of Montana <i>P.O. Box 1968</i> <i>Missoula, MT 59806</i> • State Voices

Nebraska	Agencies • Nebraska Secretary of State Suite 2300, State Capitol Building Lincoln, NE 68509-4608 Organizations • Get My Vote Back • ACLU Nebraska • Civic Nebraska 206 S. 13th Street, Suite 800 Lincoln, NE 68508
Nevada	Agencies • Nevada Attorney General's Office Office of the Attorney General 100 North Carson Street Carson City, NV 89701 Nevada Secretary of State, Elections Division 101 North Carson Street, Suite 3 Carson City, NV 89701-4786 Organizations • Prison Legal Advocacy Network • Mass Liberation Project Nevada • Return Strong 732 S. 6th St., #5002 Las Vegas, NV 89101
New Hampshire	Agencies • NH Secretary of State Elections Division State House, Room 204 107 North Main Street Concord, NH 03301-4989 Note: registration is handled by your town or city clerk. Organizations • ACLU New Hampshire 18 Low Ave. Concord, NH 03301

New Jersey	Agencies • N.J. Department of Law and Public Safety <i>Division of Elections</i> <i>P.O. Box 304</i> <i>Trenton, NJ 08625-0304</i> • N.J. Gov Organizations • ACLU New Jersey • New Jersey Institute for Social Justice <i>60 Park Place, Suite 511</i> <i>Newark, NJ 07102</i> • Vote Riders
New Mexico	Agencies • NM Secretary of State <i>Bureau of Elections</i> <i>325 Don Gaspar, Suite 300</i> <i>Santa Fe, NM 87503</i> Organizations • ACLU of New Mexico <i>P.O. Box 566</i> <i>Albuquerque, NM 87103</i>
New York	Agencies • New York State Board of Elections <i>40 North Pearl Street, Suite 5</i> <i>Albany, NY 12207-2729</i> • New York State Board of Elections Organizations • NYCLU • Alliance of Families for Justice <i>8 W. 126th Street, 3rd Floor</i> <i>New York, NY 10027</i> • Let NY Vote • NYC Votes • Center for Law and Social Justice

North Carolina	Agencies • North Carolina State Board of Elections P.O. Box 27255 Raleigh, NC 27611-7255 Organizations • Forward Justice P.O. Box 1932 Durham, NC 27702 • Democracy North Carolina • ACLU of North Carolina
North Dakota	Agencies • ND Secretary of State 600 E. Boulevard Ave., Dept. 108 Bismarck, ND 58505-0500 Note: North Dakota has no voter registration. Organizations • Legal Services of North Dakota • ACLU of North Dakota • North Dakota Native Vote P.O. Box 226 Bismarck, ND 58502
Ohio	Agencies • Ohio Secretary of State 180 S. Civic Center Drive Columbus, OH 43215 Organizations • Ohio Justice & Policy Center 215 E. 9th Street, Suite 601 Cincinnati, OH 45202 • Ohio Organizing Collaborative • ACLU of Ohio • All Voting is Local (Ohio)

Oklahoma	Agencies • OK State Election Board <i>Oklahoma State Election Board</i> <i>P.O. Box 528800</i> <i>Oklahoma City, OK 73152-8800</i> <i>(General mail: P.O. Box 53156, Oklahoma City, OK 73152-3156)</i> Organizations • Oklahoma Policy Institute <i>907 S. Detroit Ave., Suite 1005</i> <i>Tulsa, OK 74120</i> • ACLU of Oklahoma
Oregon	Agencies • Oregon Secretary of State <i>Elections Division</i> <i>Public Service Building, Suite 126</i> <i>255 Capitol St. NE</i> <i>Salem, OR 97310</i> Organizations • Next Up • ACLU of Oregon <i>P.O. Box 40585</i> <i>Portland, OR 97240</i>
Pennsylvania	Agencies • PA Department of State <i>Office of the Secretary of the Commonwealth</i> <i>210 North Office Building</i> <i>Harrisburg, PA 17120-0029</i> Organizations • Committee of Seventy <i>123 S. Broad Street, Suite 2830</i> <i>Philadelphia, PA 19109</i> • Pennsylvania Prison Society • ACLU of Pennsylvania

Rhode Island	Agencies • RI Secretary of State Rhode Island State Board of Elections 2000 Plainfield Pike Cranston, RI 02921 Organizations • Common Cause Rhode Island 245 Waterman Street, Suite 105 Providence, RI 02906 • Direct Action for Rights and Equality (DARE) • ACLU of Rhode Island
South Carolina	Agencies • SC State Election Commission P.O. Box 5987 Columbia, SC 29250-5987 Organizations • South Carolina Appleseed P.O. Box 7187 Columbia, SC 29202 • SC Coalition for Voter Participation • ACLU of South Carolina
South Dakota	Agencies • SD Secretary of State Elections, Secretary of State 500 E. Capitol Pierre, SD 57501-5070 Organizations • South Dakota Voices for Peace P.O. Box 600 Sioux Falls, SD 57101 • ACLU of South Dakota

Tennessee	Agencies • TN Secretary of State Coordinator of Elections Tennessee Tower, Seventh Floor 312 Rosa L. Parks Ave. Nashville, TN 37243-1102 Organizations • Free Hearts 2013 25th Ave. N Nashville, TN 37208 • TBA.org • ACLU of Tennessee • United Way of Greater Nashville • Legal Aid Society of Middle Tennessee 1321 Murfreesboro Pike, Suite 400, Nashville, TN 37217 • Equity Alliance
Texas	Agencies • Texas Secretary of State Elections Division, P.O. Box 12060, Austin, TX 78711-2060 Organizations • Texas Civil Rights Project PO Box 17757 Austin, TX 78760 • Pure Justice Mailing Address: Pure Justice 5380 W. 34th St. 305, Houston, TX, 77092, United States • ACLU of Texas address: P.O. Box 8306, Houston, TX 77288
Utah	Agencies • Lieutenant Governor's Office Mailing Address: P.O. Box 142325, Salt Lake City, UT 84114 Organizations • ACLU Utah 311 S. State St., Suite 310 Salt Lake City, UT 84111 • Alliance for a Better Utah P.O. Box 521847 Salt Lake City, UT 84152

Vermont	Agencies • Vermont.gov Office of the Secretary of State Elections Division 128 State Street Montpelier, VT 05633-1101 Organizations • Disability Rights Vermont Mailing address: 141 Main St., Ste. 7, Montpelier, VT 05602 • trincoll.edu • ACLU of Vermont Mailing address: ACLU of Vermont, PO Box 277, Montpelier, VT 05601
Virginia	Agencies • Restoration of Rights - Virginia.gov Secretary of the Commonwealth Restoration of Rights P.O. Box 2454 Richmond, VA 23218 Virginia Department of Elections 1100 Bank Street, 1st Floor Richmond, VA 23219 Organizations • Revive My Vote • ACLU of Virginia P.O. Box 26464, Richmond, VA 23261 • Virginia Mercury • New Virginia Majority 9327 Midlothian Turnpike, Suite 1L Richmond, VA 23235
Washington	Agencies • Washington Secretary of State PO Box 40229 Olympia, WA 98504-0229 Organizations • Civil Survival Civil Survival PO Box 634 Port Orchard, WA 98366 • ACLU of Washington PO Box 2728 Seattle, WA 98111-2728 United States 206.624.2184

West Virginia	Agencies • WV Secretary of State <i>1900 Kanawha Blvd. E, Building 1, Suite 157K, Charleston, WV 25305</i> Organizations • West Virginia Citizen Action Group <i>1500 Dixie Street Charleston, WV 25311</i> • ACLU West Virginia <i>ACLU of WV P.O. Box 3952 Charleston, WV 25339</i>
Wisconsin	Agencies • Wisconsin Elections Commission <i>Wisconsin Elections Commission P.O. Box 7984 Madison, Wisconsin 53707-7984</i> Organizations • EXPO of Wisconsin <i>17 Applegate Court, Suite 100, Madison, WI 5371</i> • ACLU of Wisconsin
Wyoming	Agencies • Restoration of Rights - WDOC <i>Wyoming Department of Corrections Attn: Field Services Administrator 1934 Wyott Drive, Suite 100 Cheyenne, WY 82002</i> Organizations • Legal Aid of Wyoming <i>Cheyenne Administrative Office Mailing Address: P.O. Box 128, Cheyenne, WY 82003</i>



US Legal Empowerment Network, housed at NYU Law's Bernstein Institute for Human Rights is an intergenerational, intersectional movement of organizers, lawyers, and community members working to ensure people have the tools to know, use, shape and transform the systems that impact their lives.

The Jailhouse Lawyer Initiative is founded and led by Jhody Polk, and exists to disrupt the cycle of incarceration by ensuring that jailhouse lawyers have access to quality legal education, training and a supportive community as they seek to know, use, shape and transform the law.