

End Felony Disenfranchisement and Restore the Right to Vote

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Fight Voter Suppression and Restore Constitutional Rights to All Active and Contributing Citizens in Minnesota.

Issue Statement

In Minnesota, felony disenfranchisement is the withdrawal of voting rights of individuals with a criminal offense through incarceration, probation, parole, or supervised release. Current felony disenfranchisement laws prohibit roughly 55,000 Minnesotans' right to vote long after their release from incarceration. This law specifically suppresses Minnesotans of color, vulnerable populations, and low-income communities. Promptly restoring the right to vote for individuals with felony convictions upon release from imprisonment will promote equality in voter representation for actively contributing members of society.

The Problem

Over [55,000 Minnesotans](#) are currently locked out of our democracy, representing 1.3% of the state's voting eligible population. Approximately seventy-two percent of felony convictions in [Minnesota](#) result in probation, which restricts their eligibility to vote until the probationary period has ended.



Source: Restorethevotemn.org

The Need in Minnesota

The right to vote is the core of American democracy. Its history is full of successful stories to expand the franchise to those previously barred from voting due to their race, class, or gender. As a result, our democracy better represents the rich diversity of the American people. The biggest threat to this franchise is the barrier preventing [5.85 million](#) U.S. citizens from voting. Felony disenfranchisement has its origins begin in the Jim Crow Era and the laws were designed to lock persons who were formerly enslaved out of the voting process.

Of those [Minnesotans convicted of a felony](#), approximately 47,000 (82%) live in the community on probation or supervised release. The majority live outside of Hennepin and Ramsey Counties. Despite these individuals living, working, and raising families in our communities, but due to these convictions in their past they are still denied the right to vote.

Disenfranchisement harms not only individual rights but their families and entire communities. Denying voting rights to even one individual causes a ripple effect that can drastically change and decrease the political power of [rural, urban, and minority communities](#). Disenfranchisement laws may affect voter turnout in neighborhoods with high incarceration rates, even among people who are eligible to vote (Vasilogambros, 2020).

Access a previous policy brief on [Restoring Voting Rights here](#)

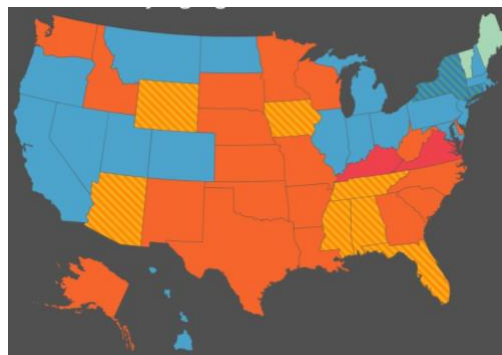
Current Law in Minnesota

As of March 1, 2023, the [Minnesota Statute](#) section 201.014, regarding the eligibility to vote, subdivision 2 states that citizens who have been convicted of a felony will not have their civil rights restored while they are currently serving a felony prison sentence, or are currently under probationary or parole supervision.

Current Policy Approaches and Efforts

In the United States, states have [varying policies](#) regarding voter eligibility for people with felony convictions. [Minnesota's voting laws](#) are more restrictive than in 24 other states. The differing eligibility laws create confusion and lead to misinformation for individuals furthering disenfranchisement.

Efforts have been made to restore the vote by asking the court system to review the constitutional rights of citizens who are on probation or parole after serving their prison sentence. In February 2023, a court case challenged the current law by claiming that the current restrictions impede on their constitutional right to vote. In February, 2023, the [Minnesota Supreme Court](#) declined to restore voting rights to people with felony records who still haven't satisfied parole or probation.



Voting Rights for Formerly Incarcerated People

- Some people with felony convictions cannot vote.
- People with felony convictions can vote upon completion of sentence.
- People in prison and on parole cannot vote. All other people with criminal convictions, including people on probation, can vote.
- People in prison cannot vote. Everyone else can vote.
- Everyone has the right to vote.
- All people with felony convictions are permanently disenfranchised.

Policy Position Statement

Ending felony disenfranchisement and restoring the right to vote is a fundamental right for all American citizens no matter their criminal background. It is part of a national movement to give ex-offenders voting rights as both a racial justice step and as part of their rehabilitation and reintroduction into society. The restoration would apply to any person convicted of a felony who isn't incarcerated, regardless of whether they are on parole, probation, or supervised release.

To promote restoration of the right to vote we recommend the following:

- Provide training for individuals to assist with the reentry process and assist gaining the right to vote.
- Initiate automatic voter registration for convicted felons upon the completion of their probation, parole, or supervised release.
- Pass legislation allowing those on probation, parole, or supervised release for a felony offense to vote.

Link to digital copy

