
Restore the Right to Vote

The ACLU of Washington supports legislation that automatically restores the right to vote to citizens who have come out of the criminal justice system.

OUR CURRENT SYSTEM: UNWORKABLE AND UNFAIR

This November, more than 3 million people in Washington participated in our federal, state and local elections. It is exciting that so many people took the time to make their voices heard.

But there are more than 167,000 Washington citizens who are prohibited from engaging in this most essential part of democracy because of our state's unnecessarily complicated system for restoring voting rights. Poor people and people of color are hit the hardest, with 17% of African Americans and 10 % of the voting age Latino population prevented from voting under our current laws.

AUTOMATIC RESTORATION: PROVIDES A BRIGHT LINE FOR ELECTIONS OFFICIALS, MEANS A SAFER COMMUNITY FOR US ALL.

- **Reduces the risk of reoffending:**
Restoring the right to vote encourages people to reconnect with their communities and become good citizens. Research has shown that people who voted after being released are 50% less likely to be re-arrested than those who did not vote.

- **Separates personal financial circumstances from one's right to vote:**

The right to vote should never be tied to a person's financial means. Currently, citizens are prevented from voting until they have repaid all of their Legal Financial Obligations—fees and other costs associated with their sentence. Our laws impose a 12% interest rate on these debts. Many people coming out of the criminal justice system find their debt increasing despite making monthly payments – essentially assuring that poor individuals will lose the right to vote permanently.

- **Simplifies a complicated, costly, and ineffective process**

Under our current laws, it can still take nine separate steps, involving state and county officials and several forms and petitions, to regain the vote. In fact, there are at least five different ways to regain the right to vote, depending on when and where the person was sentenced. Even elections officials often are unsure who is and is not eligible to vote.

Automatic restoration works in other states!

Thirteen other states, including Oregon, plus the District of Columbia, automatically restore the right to vote.



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