



Felony Disfranchisement in Arizona

In the United States, over 5.4 million Americans are barred from voting due to criminal convictions. Felony disfranchisement laws vary from state to state, with Arizona's policy among the 10 most regressive - permanently banning certain individuals with a felony conviction from voting. Two of the 10 bar all persons with a felony conviction from voting.

The vast majority of disfranchised individuals are no longer incarcerated, but are living in their communities on probation or parole; 2.1 million of the disfranchised population have fully completed their sentences. These disfranchised individuals are tax-paying citizens, involved with the issues in their community, but unable to vote to affect them.

The impact of felony disfranchisement falls disproportionately upon communities of color. Nearly 1.5 million African-American men, or 13%, are disfranchised due to felony convictions, a rate that is 7 times the national average of 1 out of 41 adults. If incarceration rates hold steady, 3 in 10 of the next generation of black men can expect to be disfranchised at some point in their lives.

However, over the last decade the national trend has been toward lowering barriers for the disfranchised. Since 1997, 16 states have made progressive changes to their felony disfranchisement laws, enfranchising over 700,000 formerly incarcerated individuals.

In a democracy, voting is a right, not a privilege. But for over 5 million Americans, that is not the case. We are aiming to change that in Arizona.

- More than 176,000 Arizona residents are disfranchised.
- The vast majority of Arizona's disfranchised population is not in prison or jail, but lives in Arizona's communities.
- Arizona has the second highest rate of African-American disfranchisement in the country, with 1 out of every 5 voting age African-Americans disfranchised.
- Arizona has more restrictive felony disfranchisement laws than 40 other states, including New Mexico, Colorado, Utah, Texas and California.

Arizona Disfranchisement Policy

In Arizona, individuals on probation, in prison or on parole cannot vote. A first time offender has his or her right to vote restored automatically upon completion of sentence, as long as there are no outstanding financial obligations to the state. Individuals with multiple felony convictions are barred from voting, unless they seek to have their rights restored through a court process or a pardon.

Who is disfranchised regionally?

Arizona's felony disfranchisement laws are more restrictive than 5 neighboring states. Utah automatically restores voting rights upon release from incarceration; California and Colorado allow individuals on probation, but not parole, to vote; New Mexico and Texas restore voting rights upon full completion of sentence.

Who is disfranchised in Arizona?

An estimated 176,103 people with felony convictions are barred from voting in Arizona. Only 20% of the disfranchised are in prison, while 31% are on parole and another 5% are on probation. Almost 44% of the disfranchised population, 77,136 individuals, have fully completed their sentences. Like many of us,

individuals who have fully completed their sentences live in their communities and work, pay taxes and raise families.

Racial Impact

One out of 5 voting age African-Americans is disfranchised in Arizona, compared to 1 out of 23 voting age Arizonans. As a result, Arizona has the second highest rate of African-American disfranchisement in the United States. African Americans comprise 14% of the disfranchised population, even though they comprise only 3% of the state's voting age population.

Voting & Public Safety

Felony disfranchisement runs counter to the goal of public safety. Restricting voting rights does not prevent crime, nor does it provide compensation to victims. In fact, disfranchising persons after release from prison is antithetical to the reentry process and harmful to long-term prospects for sustainable reintegration of ex-offenders into society. Research has found a link between voting participation and re-offense; people who voted after release from supervision were half as likely to be re-arrested as those who did not vote. Similar effects were found among people with a prior arrest;

27% of non-voters were re-arrested, compared to 12% of people who had voted.

Far from making streets safer, felony disfranchisement may be detrimental to public safety. Voting demonstrates an individual's commitment to the institutions of American democracy. The irony of felony disfranchisement is that the very behavior that society strives to encourage - the commitment to the larger social and political collective - is undermined by a policy that requires people who desire to engage in that behavior to relinquish the right to vote.

How can I help in Arizona?

Join the statewide coalition working to repeal Arizona's law. To contact the coalition, email ameetzel@acluaz.org.

Call your legislator and tell them you support legislation that automatically restores voting rights upon completion of sentence.

Visit www.democracysghosts.com and <http://www.acluaz.org> to learn more about the issue and watch a film on felon disfranchisement. Show the film to your friends and neighbors!