

WHY VOTING IS IMPORTANT

Our vote is our voice. It is our right. It is key to a free democracy. It gives us power. It lets us be a part of the political life of America.

The U.S. is the only democracy in the world where the right to vote is taken away from many of its citizens. Some can never vote again because of a felony conviction. (A crime is a felony if the punishment is one year or more of jail time). Research shows that people who commit crimes are more likely to stay out of prison or jail if they regain their right to vote so helping former felons regain their right to vote helps everyone. To not let a former felon vote is like taxation without representation.

CONSIDER THESE FACTS

- In Puerto Rico, Maine and Vermont no one ever loses their right to vote, even if they are in jail or prison.
- In fifteen states and D.C. a former felon can vote while on probation or parole.

YET

- Nearly 5.3 million Americans cannot vote because of a felony conviction. As of 2008:
 - 585,000 were US Veterans; 676,000 were women; and 98,000 of them lived in Tennessee.
- 13% of African-American men in the US are barred from voting forever because of a past felony. As of 2008, 38,200 lived in Tennessee. In parts of the South as many as 30 percent of African-American men could not vote.
- Former felons living in Tennessee who are on probation or parole cannot vote.

A TN LAW MAKES IT EASIER FOR FORMER FELONS TO VOTE

Your right to vote can be restored when:

- Your sentence is complete
- You have finished your probation and parole
- You have paid all court-ordered restitution and court costs
- You are current on court-ordered child support

HOW TO REGISTER TO VOTE

1. Obtain a Certificate of Restoration application from your:

- Local county election office
- The Tennessee Election Commission website. (<http://state.tn.us/sos/election/forms/ss-3041.pdf>)

2. Have a Certificate of Restoration form completed by:

- Your probation/parole officer, the pardoning authority, or agent or officer of the supervising or incarcerating authority certifying that your sentence is complete, including all terms of probation and parole, AND
- The circuit or criminal court clerk or their agent, or the probation/parole officer, or an agent or officer of the supervising or incarcerating authority certifying that all court-ordered restitution is paid in full.

3. Deliver your completed Certificate of Restoration application to the local Election Commission office.

They will send it to the State Election Commission for their review and to make sure all child support obligations are current. You will be notified that your right to vote has been restored or that your restoration application has been denied and why.

4. If your right to vote has been restored, obtain a Voter Registration form from the local election commission office or the Tennessee Election Commission website and fill it out.

- Include your name and street address. (A P.O. Box is not acceptable. If you are homeless ask a local shelter or community organization to allow you to list their address).
- Fill in your birth date and social security number. Check that this is a new registration.
- Check that you have been convicted of a felony. Sign your name.

5. Deliver your completed Voter Registration form

with your approved Certificate of Restoration to the local Election Commission office in the county in which you live or send it to the address listed on the form.

Be sure to keep a copy of both forms for your records.

REGISTERED VOTERS

AFTER YOU REGISTER TO VOTE

You will receive a card informing you that your registration was completed (only in some counties)

OR

You will receive a voter card in the mail

OR

You will receive a letter asking for more information. If you don't respond to the letter you may not be allowed to register.

NOTE: Call the local Election Commission office if you do not receive any notice within two weeks from the date you turned in the forms.

VOTING FOR THE FIRST TIME

The first time you vote you need to bring identification with you. Something that shows your name and address is good, such as your social security card, your driver's license or a utility bill.

INFORMATION ABOUT CANDIDATES

Sample ballots are published in the local newspaper. You can also contact your local Election Commission to learn if a sample ballot has been posted on the internet. They will also be able to tell you where to vote and the hours the polls are open.

DON'T FORGET

Remember to bring identification that shows the same address you listed on the Voter Registration form. This could be a Tennessee driver license, photo ID, utility bill, bank statement, school ID, release papers or social security card.

NOTE: To vote in an election you must register at least 30 days before the election.

PROBLEMS AT THE POLLS

If poll workers won't let you vote, you have the right to ask for a Provisional Ballot. After the election, the Election Commission will mail you a notice telling you if your vote was counted or rejected.

WHO CANNOT VOTE IN TN

If you were convicted of the following crimes during the dates listed you cannot have your right to vote restored:

- First-degree murder, aggravated rape, treason and voter fraud if you were convicted between July 1, 1986 and June 30, 1996.
- Murder, rape, treason and voter fraud if you were convicted between July 1, 1996, and June 30, 2006.
- Murder, rape, treason, voter fraud, any violent sexual offense designated as a felony where the victim of the offense was a minor, and offenses against the administration of government (official misconduct) by elected or appointed officials if you were convicted on or after July 1, 2006.

VOTING FROM JAIL & PRISON

You have the right to vote from jail and prison if:

- You're detained but not convicted.
- You've been convicted of only a misdemeanor.
- You were convicted of a felony between January 15, 1973 and May 17, 1981.

FOR MORE INFO ABOUT REGISTERING TO VOTE

■ TN Division of Elections
615-741-7956
<http://www.state.tn.us/sos/election>

■ ACLU of Tennessee
615-320-7142
<http://www.aclu-tn.org>

The Tennessee "Right to Vote Campaign" is a coalition of civil rights and civil liberties organizations working to restore voting rights for individuals with felony convictions including:

ACLU-TN
Catholic Public Policy Commission
TN AFL-CIO Labor Council
TN Bar Association (TBA)
The Restoration Project
TN Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers

National Partners:

ACLU
Brennan Center for Justice
The Sentencing Project



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GET YOUR RIGHT TO VOTE BACK

A H O W - T O
B R O C H U R E
F O R
F O R M E R F E L O N S
I N T E N N E S S E E

