



**KENTUCKIANS FOR THE  
COMMONWEALTH**

# House Bill 376

## RESTORATION OF VOTING RIGHTS

General Assembly 2018

Democracy works best when all Kentuckians can participate in decisions affecting our lives – and that includes having **the fundamental right to vote**.

A healthy democracy is essential for ensuring justice and a good quality of life for all people. Kentucky's election laws and systems should be designed with the goal of protecting each individual's access to the ballot box and increasing overall voter registration and participation.

Kentucky's outdated constitution takes away a person's right to vote forever if he or she is convicted of a felony. Even a class D felony is enough to lose voting rights unless they can get a pardon from the governor. As a result, an estimated 312,000 Kentuckians, including nearly 243,000 people have completed their sentences, are barred from participation in our democracy. Only two other states make it so difficult to get one's voting rights back.

We believe that after people have served their time, they should be given back their right to vote – because that's the right thing to do and because it makes Kentucky's democracy stronger. And it's only fair that people who work, raise families, do business, pay taxes and contribute in other important ways be allowed a voice in our government.

Restoring voting rights even contributes to crime prevention. Former felons who vote are statistically half as likely to commit future crimes than former felons who don't vote. When you think about it, it makes sense. People who feel part of a community are less likely to act out against that community.

### A solution in House Bill 376

A change is needed in Section 145 of the Kentucky Constitution to correct this problem. HB 376 would allow Kentucky voters to decide whether to allow automatic restoration of voting rights to most former felons once they've paid their debt to society. This legislation has passed the House by large bipartisan margins in 10 of the last 11 years but the Senate has never concurred.



*"Kentucky is one of the last states to permanently take away the right to vote when a person is convicted of a felony. I have a friend who wants to get that right back. He told me, 'I want to be a citizen again.' Let's give him and others their right to vote. Let's give them a say in their community."*

**RICHARD YOUNG, ELSMERE, KY**

**IN KENTUCKY  
MORE THAN 312,000  
RESIDENTS ARE  
DENIED THE RIGHT  
TO VOTE**

Kentucky is one of only three states to enforce lifetime voting bans on all persons with felony convictions resulting in the disenfranchisement of more than 312,000 residents.



**1 OF THE LAST  
4 STATES TO BAN  
FORMER FELONS  
FROM VOTING FOR LIFE**

**#3 IN RATE OF  
DISENFRANCHISEMENT**

**#1 IN RATE OF  
DISENFRANCHISEMENT  
OF AFRICAN AMERICANS**



**AN ADDITIONAL WAITING PERIOD IS NOT NECESSARY AND UNJUST**

Judges or juries set the length of probation or parole based on the severity of the offense. An additional waiting period of a pre-determined length set by the legislature fails to recognize differences in the type of felony committed. It would mean the legislature is applying a judicial sentence through an additional waiting period could be longer than the actual sentence!

**Mantell Stevens**  
Fayette County

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I am a Kentuckian. My felony was back in 2000 – 17 years ago. I was 20 years old and got a felony for possession of drugs. And that’s when my life changed instantly. I spent 30 days in jail and three years on probation. And that’s how I lost my right to vote. I have never seen the inside of a prison, but I’m one of the 312,000 other Kentuckians who can’t vote. I’m a responsible citizen. I’m active in my community, in my church. I’m a worker. I pay

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**Rev. Damon Horton**  
Fayette County

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I haven’t always been a minister. At one point, I was a gang member and a drug dealer. I ended up getting arrested and sentenced to 12 years. It was a little after that I realized the Lord was calling on me to preach. I really changed my life around. After I got out in 2006, I was ordained and rededicated my life to serving other people. Even though the Lord has forgiven me, it’s still hard for society to accept me. I can pay taxes, but I can’t vote or have a

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**Sandy Holbert**  
Scott County

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I’m a former felon ... but that’s not all I am. I’m a mother of four, daughter, a sister, a Sunday school teacher, a social worker and so much more. It’s important to teach that actions have consequences, but I’ve paid my time for what I did wrong. Former felons are real people. We’re not stereotypes. We’re human beings. I still have an opinion and I have the right to voice that and for it to make a difference. It’s time for us to change.

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*2017 League of Women Voters report:*

**Kentucky Felony Voting Law Bars OVER 312,000 From Polls;  
126,000 MORE BANNED SINCE 2006 REPORT**

- Kentucky one of four states to ban former felons from voting
- Kentucky #3 in rate of disenfranchisement
- Kentucky #1 in disenfranchisement of African Americans
- 312,000 currently disenfranchised, 126,000 more than reported in 2006 study

Kentucky is one of only four states to enforce life-time voting bans on all persons with felony convictions resulting in the disenfranchisement of more than 312,000 residents. This is an increase of more than 68,000 since the figures reported by the League in 2013 and 126,000 since the 2006 report.

***One of every 11 adults in Kentucky is ineligible to vote due to a previous felony conviction, a rate of 9.1 percent, nearly three times the national average of 2.47 percent or one in 40.***