



## **Commonwealth of Kentucky**

### **Office of the Governor**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **Governor Beshear Helps Restore Rights to Kentuckians**

**FRANKFORT, KY (March 4, 2008)** – Kentucky Gov. Steve Beshear today announced he is removing certain barriers in the application process to restore felony voting rights.

Convicted felons who have fulfilled the requirements of their sentences will no longer have to pay a fee, write an essay or secure three recommendations to obtain the right to vote again. In addition, the process will require one – not two – formal notifications to prosecutors.

“The right to vote is a fundamental foundation of democracy,” said Gov. Beshear. “This new policy will help streamline and simplify an application process that has been made so unwieldy and time-consuming that it essentially discourages or defeats inmates’ efforts to restore that right.”

According to Department of Corrections statistics, more than 600 people per year were winning back their right to vote before the existing barriers were put in place by the previous administration. In recent years, the number fell to just over 250 per year. The average approval rate plunged from 97.2 to 28.1 percent.

Today in Kentucky, the right to vote is denied to nearly 129,000 adults who have been in trouble with the law. This includes one in four African-American adults.

“The ability to vote is a primary right and privilege afforded to Kentuckians,” said Secretary of State Trey Grayson. “Finding an efficient way to restore voting rights to individuals who successfully pay their debt to society offers them a positive opportunity

to fully participate. Today's actions balance our responsibility to seek restitution for our communities and families with our moral obligation to forgive."

The governor's policy retains a safety valve that confirms that inmates have fulfilled all of their sentencing requirements before they get to vote again. It also gives prosecutors a chance to object when circumstances merit a second look.

"The League of Women Voters of Kentucky applauds and endorses the intelligent and compassionate changes Gov. Beshear is placing into effect by his executive order today," said Teena Halbig, president of the League of Women Voters of Kentucky. "The League avidly protects the right to vote, and we favor Gov. Beshear's commitment to removing the roadblocks that have long stifled the restoration of voting rights for ex felons in Kentucky."

The new policy becomes effective immediately. The governor has directed Department of Corrections officials to revise their procedures manuals to reflect the new policy and to assist inmates in completing the application before release.

Also, the administration's general counsel has begun applying the new process to a backlog of more than 1,500 applications left over from the previous administration, in addition to the 176 new applications that have been submitted since Jan. 1.

"This isn't about being tough on crime," said Gov. Beshear. "It is about treating people fairly and about welcoming back people trying to put their lives together again and become good citizens."

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