

American Probation and Parole Association



November 14, 2008

United States Commission on Civil Rights
Kentucky Advisory Committee
Southern Regional Office
61 Forsyth Street, SW, Suite 18T40
Atlanta, Georgia 30303

Re: Kentucky's Felony Disenfranchisement Law

Dear Members of the Committee:

I write to submit comments to the Kentucky Advisory Committee of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights regarding Kentucky's felony disenfranchisement policy.

I am Executive Director of the American Probation and Parole Association (APPA) headquartered in Lexington, Kentucky. APPA is an international association composed of members from the United States, Canada and other countries actively involved with probation, parole and community-based corrections. Our members supervise more than 4 million people across the country and nearly 18,000 people here in Kentucky. I strongly support a change in Kentucky's archaic and highly restrictive policy of lifetime felony disenfranchisement.

As someone with 35 years of professional experience in the criminal and juvenile justice field, I strongly believe that full civic participation by citizens living in our community enhances public safety.

Reforming Kentucky's disenfranchisement law would strengthen the prospects for sustainable rehabilitation for those with past conviction histories. There is little question that disenfranchisement laws work against the successful reentry of offenders. A critical component of successful reentry is the promotion of pro social behavior by aiding individuals with felony convictions to reintegrate themselves into community life through employment and civic participation.

There is no credible evidence showing that continuing to disenfranchise people after they have returned to the community serves any legitimate law enforcement purpose. To the contrary, restoring the right to vote sends the message that ex-offenders are welcome as integral members of their home communities and invests them in our democracy. Bringing people into the

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political process makes them stakeholders in their communities and more likely to lead law-abiding lives.

Continued denial of voting rights counters the purpose of our criminal justice system. Criminal sentences are designed to assign proper punishment to the convicted and allow the criminal justice system to rehabilitate the offender. Once the criminal justice system allows individuals to return to their community, the offender should be considered rehabilitated and able to rejoin society as a whole citizen.

Last year, APPA's Board of Directors passed a resolution endorsing voting rights restoration after release from prison. I have attached a copy of the resolution for your reference. APPA does not stand alone in this issue. Other criminal justice and law enforcement agencies, including the National Black Police Association and the Association of Paroling Authorities International, have passed similar resolutions.

Kentucky has an historic opportunity to join the national movement to restore voting rights to people who have been released from incarceration and have returned to their community. In the interest of protecting public safety and promoting American democracy, I urge the Commission to recommend ending Kentucky's voting ban.

Thank you for consideration of APPA's stance on this very important issue.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Carl Wicklund". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Carl" being more prominent than the last name "Wicklund".

Carl Wicklund
Executive Director

Enc. (1)

APPA Resolution

Restoration of Voting Rights September, 2007

WHEREAS, many citizens who have been convicted of felonies and have completed their sentences, including community supervision, do not have the right to vote; and

WHEREAS, many states have some restrictions on voting privileges for felons; and

WHEREAS, the loss of the right to vote is not based on a need to protect the integrity of the electoral process and the justice system; and

WHEREAS, disenfranchisement of felons is disproportionately affecting an increasingly large segment of the population and their families; and

WHEREAS, disenfranchisement laws work against the successful reentry of offenders;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the American Probation and Parole Association advocates the restoration of voting rights upon completion of an offender's prison sentence and advocates no loss of voting rights while on community supervision.