



MEDIA ALERT

Rhode Island Voters Approve Voting Rights for People on Probation and Parole



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RI Voters Approve Voting Rights for People on Probation and Parole

- 15,000 people will regain right to vote
- Gain is latest in national movement to reform felony voting laws
- Reforms likely to emerge in other states

PROVIDENCE- An estimated 15,000 Rhode Island residents will regain their right to vote now that voters yesterday approved a ballot measure restoring the right to vote to people on probation and parole.

On Election Day, a first-of-its-kind ballot referendum allowed Rhode Island voters to decide whether or not to restore the vote for citizens living in the community under probation or parole supervision. The measure was supported by 51.5% of the voters.

Efforts to approve the measure, Question 2 on the ballot, were led by the Rhode Island Right to Vote Campaign, a coalition of law enforcement, religious organizations, labor unions, civic leaders and civil rights groups. Campaign supporters included Providence Police Chief Colonel Dean Esserman, Senator Lincoln Chafee, Rhode Island Secretary of State Matthew A. Brown, Rhode Island chapters of the League of Women Voters, Common Cause, ACLU, NAACP, as well as the Rhode Island Family Life Center, the State Council of Churches, and the Rhode Island Bar Association.

“Voters have spoken for a stronger democracy in Rhode Island, one that includes the voices of all people who are living in our communities, working, paying taxes and supporting their families,” said Sol Rodriguez, Executive Director of the Family Life Center. “Denying the right to vote to people with felony convictions who want to turn their lives around and become contributing members of society is counterproductive.”

Among those who have regained their vote is Andres Idarraga, a full-time student at Brown University who spent time in prison before turning his life around. Under Rhode Island’s old law, Idarraga would not have regained his right to vote until 2037. Koren Carbuccia, a mother and student, also regained her voting rights after yesterday’s election. Carbuccia, whose young son began school this year, is glad to be able to vote in her local school board elections in order to ensure that the interests of her special needs child are represented. “With the right to vote, I can

be a better parent now," said Carbuccia.

Yesterday's landmark public endorsement of voting rights for people with felony convictions comes at a time of a national shift towards reform of laws that disenfranchise people with convictions. A report released last month by The Sentencing Project found 16 states expanded voting access to people with felony records over a period of 10 years. Reforms ranged from repealing lifetime bans to easing the restoration process. More than 600,000 people regained their voting rights, according to the report [*A Decade of Reform: Felony Disenfranchisement Policy in the United States*](#).

Next year, felony voting rights laws are likely to receive increasing attention in other states, including Florida and Alabama. In Florida, one of three states to retain a lifetime ban on voting by people with felony convictions, Governor-elect Charlie Crist endorsed the automatic restoration of voting rights upon completion of sentence during his campaign. Such a change could restore the right to vote to about 900,000 Florida residents. In Alabama, a recent court decision finding the current felony voting law unconstitutional because of confusion regarding which crimes qualify for disenfranchisement, will likely move the state legislature to take up the issue when it meets in 2007.

"The Rhode Island vote demonstrates public support both for democracy and for giving people a second chance," said Laleh Ispahani, Senior Policy Counsel for the American Civil Liberties Union. "The entire community benefits when everyone's voice becomes part of the political debate."

The Rhode Island Right to Vote Campaign was supported by the national Right to Vote Campaign, a joint effort of the American Civil Liberties Union, Brennan Center for Justice at NYU Law School, and The Sentencing Project.

Spokespersons from the three organizations are available for comment on the national implications of the Rhode Island ballot measure victory. For further comment contact: Laleh Ispahani, ACLU, 212-549- 2594; Deborah Goldberg, Brennan Center for Justice, 212-998-6748; and Marc Mauer, The Sentencing Project, 202-628-0871.

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