



## Restore Voting Rights to People on Parole and/or Community Supervision After Ten Years To Encourage Productive Community Engagement

### RESTORING VOTING RIGHTS

After someone receives a felony offense in Texas, voting rights cannot be restored until he or she has fully completed parole and/or community supervision, a process that can take decades.<sup>1</sup> But restoring voting rights to formerly incarcerated populations can positively contribute to their rehabilitation process, providing them an additional tool to become productive and engaged members of society. Research supports that when formerly incarcerated populations are able to successfully reenter society, they are less likely to recidivate, thus increasing public safety.

However, many Texans do not have the opportunity to vote:

- **495,928 Texans were barred from voting as of October 2016.**<sup>2</sup>
- Approximately 2.5% of voting-age Texans – **1 in every 40 adults** – cannot vote due to a criminal conviction.<sup>3</sup>
- Of that population, **nearly 112,000 Texans are unable to vote while serving time on parole.**<sup>4</sup>
- **More than 8,000 Texans** have been on parole for more than 10 years.<sup>5</sup>

Furthermore, loss of voting rights disproportionately impacts African Americans and Latinos due to disparities within the criminal justice system. In Texas, 6.2% of African Americans are disenfranchised.<sup>6</sup>

### KEY FINDINGS

- **No evidence suggests that withholding the right to vote deters crime.**<sup>7</sup> In fact, withholding voting rights may impede a person's rehabilitation by increasing feelings of alienation, stigmatization, and humiliation.<sup>8</sup> Research suggests that democratic participation is positively associated with a reduction in recidivism.<sup>9</sup>
- Collateral consequences that result from a felony conviction – including loss of voting rights – function as an obstacle to achieving and maintaining stability within a community.<sup>10</sup> **Data indicate that states that disenfranchise felons experience significantly higher rates of repeat offenses than states that do not.**<sup>11</sup>

### COMMUNITY-BUILDING & PUBLIC SAFETY-DRIVEN SOLUTION: SUPPORT HB 1307 BY REP. SENFRONIA THOMPSON

**HB 1307 will restore voting rights to individuals on parole and/or community supervision after 10 years.** Voting is a simple yet effective way for formerly incarcerated people to become and remain positively involved in their communities.<sup>12</sup> **It fosters the creation of social ties and is part of identity formation, signaling formal membership within the political community and granting status to its participants.**<sup>13</sup>

*Citations on reverse.*

### IN SHORT

- HB 1307 will restore voting rights to individuals who have been on parole and/or community supervision for more than 10 years.
- HB 1307 will decrease recidivism by engaging people to be more involved in the community and democratic process.

## Citations

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<sup>1</sup> "Felons Face Difficulties in Regaining Voting Rights," Reporting Texas. Accessed March 12, 2017.

<http://reportingtexas.com/felons-face-difficulties-in-regaining-voting-rights/>.

<sup>2</sup> Christopher Uggen, Ryan Larson, and Sarah Shannon, "6 Million Lost Voters: State-Level Estimates of Felony Disenfranchisement, 2016, *The Sentencing Project* (2016): 1-17, <http://www.sentencingproject.org/publications/6-million-lost-voters-state-level-estimates-felony-disenfranchisement-2016/>

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Data request submitted by Representative Senfronia Thompson to the Texas Department of Criminal Justice, data received April 6, 2017. *Data available upon request.*

<sup>6</sup> The Sentencing Project, THE FACTS: State-by-State data, 2016, 1-4, <http://www.sentencingproject.org/the-facts/#map?dataset-option=FDR>

<sup>7</sup> "Felons Face Difficulties in Regaining Voting Rights," Reporting Texas. Accessed March 12, 2017.

<http://reportingtexas.com/felons-face-difficulties-in-regaining-voting-rights/>.

<sup>8</sup> Siegel, J. A. "Felon Disenfranchisement and the Fight for Universal Suffrage." *Social Work* 56, no. 1 (2011): 89-91. doi:10.1093/sw/56.1.89.

<sup>9</sup> Hamilton-Smith, Guy Padraic, and Matthew Vogel. "The Ballot as a Bulwark: The Impact of Felony Disenfranchisement on Recidivism." *SSRN Electronic Journal*. doi:10.2139/ssrn.1919617.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Siegel, J. A. "Felon Disenfranchisement and the Fight for Universal Suffrage." *Social Work* 56, no. 1 (2011): 89-91. doi:10.1093/sw/56.1.89.