

BRENNAN CENTER FOR JUSTICE

THE DEMOCRACY RESTORATION ACT FACT SHEET

This bill, co-sponsored by Senator Russell Feingold and Representative John Conyers, was introduced as S.1516 AND H.R.3335 on July 24th, 2009.

THE DEMOCRACY RESTORATION ACT WILL:

- Restore voting rights in federal elections to nearly 4 million Americans who are out of prison and living in the community.
- Ensure that people on probation never lose their right to vote in federal elections.
- Notify people about their right to vote in federal elections when they are leaving prison, sentenced to probation, or convicted of a misdemeanor.

WHY THIS BILL IS IMPORTANT:

Restoring voting rights to people with felony convictions in their past will:

- **Strengthen our democracy.** The right to vote forms the core of American democracy. A strong, vibrant democracy requires the broadest possible base of voter participation.
- **Advance civil rights.** Felony disenfranchisement laws are firmly rooted in the Jim Crow era and were intended to bar minorities from voting. The intended effects of these laws continue today: nationwide 2 million African-Americans are disenfranchised.
- **Aid law enforcement.** Allowing people to vote after release from prison encourages participation in civic life and helps rebuild ties to the community that motivate law-abiding behavior.
- **Facilitate election administration.** Restoring voting rights to people out of prison eliminates the opportunity for erroneous purges of eligible citizens from the voting rolls and relieves confusion among election officials and the public about who is eligible to vote.

WHAT THIS BILL WILL CHANGE:

In the United States, an estimated 5.3 million adult citizens are currently disenfranchised as a result of a criminal conviction, nearly 4 million of whom are living and working in the community. While 15 states and the District of Columbia already restore voting rights upon release from prison, 35 states continue to restrict the voting rights of people who are no longer incarcerated.

Passing the Democracy Restoration Act will restore the right to vote in federal elections to American citizens who are released from prison or serving probation sentences.

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