



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS®
OF VIRGINIA

Action Alert!

Alert No: 17-04

January 27, 2017

This "Action Alert!" is a call to action for League members and friends throughout the state to communicate with their local legislators and various committee members. We ask the legislators to take actions on proposed legislation as described in the alert below. Members may discuss the pros or cons as an individual but not as a League member. Our requests to legislators are based on our positions or those of LWVUS. It is most effective to contact your own legislator. While the legislature is in session is the best opportunity to educate legislators and to allow them to make informed decisions.

Always keep our League policy in mind:

*"Only the President or her designee is authorized to speak for the League. However, we encourage all members to contact their public officials as **individuals**, whether or not they agree with a League position."*

Very important Action Alert!! The LWV-VA feels this is an extremely bad Constitutional amendment!

SJR 223 Would Eliminate Felon's Right to Vote

All eligible Virginians should be able to vote in elections, period.

It's not a privilege that should be subject to legislative whim and granted or revoked depending on the politics of the moment. Voting is a fundamental right that should be guaranteed in the Virginia Constitution.

A state Senate subcommittee decided Wednesday morning to roll a number of proposals regarding the restoration of

voting rights to felons — some good, some bad — into a single substitute proposal (Senate Joint Resolution 223) and to recommend its adoption by the Senate Committee on Privileges and Elections that meets next **Tuesday, January 31, at 4 p.m.**

Make sure your elected officials support the right to vote for everyone.

The substitute proposal would kill a resolution (Senate Joint Resolution 319) patroned by Sen. Mamie Locke that would have given Virginians the right to vote to amend our constitution to do exactly what we want: a constitutionally protected right to vote for all Virginia residents who are U.S. citizens aged 18 and older. The resolution would give voters the chance to repeal the Jim Crow-era felon disenfranchisement provision in the Virginia Constitution and grant every Virginian a right to vote that cannot be taken away by the Legislature.

Instead of this simple affirmation of voting as a fundamental right, the substitute, patroned by Senate Majority Leader Tommy Norment, would:

- Continue to say anyone convicted of any felony at any time can never vote again unless they meet certain criteria and follow certain procedures to ask for their rights back.
- Condition the right to vote on full repayment of government fines, costs and user fees (including interest) — a modern day poll tax.
- Give the legislature the ability to decide whether a felony is violent or nonviolent and to decide the terms on which people convicted of nonviolent felonies can get their right to vote back.
- Establish very specific criteria for the governor to follow in deciding whether to give a person convicted of a violent felony their rights back, including a requirement that a person wait five years after all fines, fees and costs are paid before even asking for their rights back.

No one should be denied the right to vote based on past mistakes or their ability to pay.

Tell your state legislators to reject Senator Norment's resolution (SJR 223) as amended. Ask them to support SJ319 to affirm the right to vote for all Virginians.

Your vote should be something that government cannot take away. It's past time to start demanding the right to vote for everyone, and stop arguing about whether it is the governor or the legislature who should have the ability to decide who gets to vote and who doesn't. It's time to just say no to the idea that voting is a privilege to be granted to some class or subclass of Virginians at will. It is time to stop using the denial of the right to vote as a punishment.

It's time to allow the voters of Virginia the right to vote on enshrining the right to vote in the Constitution without limit or condition. This is a critical issue upon which we are relying on your action. All senators need to be

contacted, especially the Privileges and Elections Committee members: [Vogel](#)

([Chairman](#)), [Howell](#), [Deeds](#), [Edwards](#), [Reeves](#), [Ebbin](#), [Chafin](#), [DeSteph](#), [Chase](#), [Ruff](#), [Cosgrove](#), [Dance](#), [S
pruill](#), [Peake](#). Not sure who your state legislators are? Paste the following link into your browser and fill in your street address and zip code. <http://www.vpap.org>

*This material was provide by the ACLU of Virginia,
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*The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan political organization encouraging informed and active participation in government. It influences public policy through education and advocacy.
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