

LWV-VA and the Restoration of Voting Rights for Felons

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The recent initiative by Gov. McAuliffe to grant voting rights to a large number of ex-offenders has raised a number of questions from Virginia Leaguers. Because this has now become mired in partisan politics, with one party threatening to bring a lawsuit challenging the governors' right to do this, some Leaguers have become concerned about taking an active role

However the League's commitment to the principles involved in this action did not start with this initiative. LWVUS's position on voting reads as follows: "...voting is a fundamental citizen right that must be guaranteed."

More specifically, embedded in "Positions for Action in Brief," the statement of LWV-VA's adopted positions, is the following:

"RESTORATION OF CIVIL RIGHTS FOR VIRGINIA FELONS

Support for the automatic restoration of the civil rights of felons, regardless of the nature of their crime, upon their release from incarceration or upon completion of probation or parole. The process should be easy to understand, accessible, transparent and fair with information about the process made available to all."

Consequently we are on solid ground if we choose to join in activities that help these ex-offenders register to vote. Carol Noggle, our state Legislative Coordinator, has developed a partial list of ways League might help with this process:

- The League should be seeking felons to register just as we do for any eligible person. So, we should not be perceived as being partisan and should not limit ourselves.
- Consider being a part of groups registering voters in low-income areas where felons may be located in larger numbers. Advocacy groups in other parts of the state, such as in the city of Richmond, are indeed going into low-income housing projects. One of our coalition partners, New Virginia Majority, has been actively doing this
- Distributing fact sheets makes sense. You and your members would know where those might be seen best and most.
- Contacting probation officers could help even though a felon still on probation is not eligible, but those felons may know some who are. The Prince William County League meets with the Re-Entry Council that includes probation officers.
- You might seek out other advocacy groups that work in your area that could also supply workers -- assuming they have done the 3rd party registration training.
- A letter to the editor could be crafted to be non-partisan and just state the facts about registering a set of newly eligible persons. Countering the opposition

would not be the purpose of the letter.

- Become as informed on the issues as possible. Below are some articles that Carol Noggle gathered when the Governor made his announcement:

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<https://commonwealth.virginia.gov/judicial-system/restoration-of-rights/>

http://www.richmond.com/news/virginia/government-politics/article_19fba7ef-a47b-5690-821f-2d14546b99a2.html

https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/virginia-politics/in-virginia-the-race-is-on-to-register-200000-former-felons/2016/05/05/8c794ad0-0c9f-11e6-8ab8-9ad050f76d7d_story.html

https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/restoring-virginians-voting-rights/2016/05/08/71e5301a-12f5-11e6-8967-7ac733c56f12_story.html

http://www.newsadvance.com/opinion/editorials/restoring-a-citizen-s-fundamental-civil-rights/article_d23e8b9e-13c4-11e6-ae9-1b73fc2d5fa0.html

http://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/08/opinion/a-second-chance-and-the-right-to-vote.html?_r=0

from Fredericksburg: http://www.fredericksburg.com/news/va_md_dc/about-virginia-felons-sign-up-to-vote/article_6c06e5f8-c544-596f-aa97-4f6c47988f11.html

Finally, the governor recently added more details about the nature of the new enfranchised voters:

<https://governor.virginia.gov/newsroom/newsarticle?articleId=15207>

FAQ on Restoration of Rights of Felons

April 22, 2016

What rights are being restored?

Individuals' civil rights – the **right to vote**, serve on a jury, run for office, and become a notary public.

Who has had their rights restored?

Anyone who has been convicted of a felony in Virginia and has completed the terms of their sentence and been released from supervised probation or parole.

Does today's order only apply to individuals convicted of certain crimes?

No, the order applies to all Virginians who have been convicted of any felony and have completed the terms of their sentence and been released from supervised probation or parole.

How can I confirm my rights have been restored?

Individuals can check their status on the Secretary of Commonwealth's website: www.commonwealth.virginia.gov/ror

Can I vote now?

All individuals must register to vote before voting in any election. You may register to vote at www.elections.gov

Will I receive an official grant order?

Individual grant orders will no longer be issued. However, grant orders are available upon request.

What is the proof that my rights have been restored?

The April 22nd proclamation is proof that your rights have been restored. Individuals can also check their status on the Secretary of Commonwealth's website. www.commonwealth.virginia.gov/ror

Is restoration of rights now automatic for people who are convicted in the future?

No. The April 22nd proclamation does not create automatic rights restoration. The proclamation only restores the rights of individuals who are eligible as of April 22nd. Going forward, the Governor will continue to review eligibility and restore rights on an ongoing basis.

What if I was convicted in another state and now reside in Virginia?

Your rights have been restored provided that you meet the eligibility criteria.

What if I was convicted in Virginia and now reside in another state?

Your rights have been restored by the Governor, though this action may not be applicable in all states. Please check the requirements in the state where you currently reside.

What if I am not a U.S. citizen?

Your civil rights have been restored. Non-citizens are not eligible to vote, serve on a jury or run for office, but may be eligible to serve as a notary public.