



July 31, 2012

Dear Virginia voting rights restoration advocates,

I've just joined Advancement Project as the Director for our "Take Back Your Vote!" Campaign to change the backwards process in Virginia that results in *permanent* disenfranchisement for our friends, family, and neighbors that are convicted of a felony. This outdated law will result in more than 350,000 Virginians being unable to participate in the Presidential election this November! We're fighting to make sure that those Virginians who have paid their debt to society can take back their right to participate in our democratic process.

The clock is ticking for rights restoration applications but there's still time!

Let's push this for the next few weeks so that our friends and family can take back their vote!

Here are some ways that you can help:

1. If you have had your rights taken away in Virginia or knows someone who has, ask them to visit takebackmyvote.org or call 1-855-LET-VOTE for more information or 1-on-1 assistance.
2. Check out our Take Back Your Vote [video](#).
3. Do you have a story to share? If you've had your rights taken away in Virginia or knows someone who has please contact Richael at rfaithful@advancementproject.org or call her at (202) 728-9557 ext. 339.
4. If you know of clinics or other volunteers assisting people with applications please contact Richael.
5. Use our partner toolkit to provide information to your networks about this important issue.
6. Forward this email to your friends.

Advancement Project looks forward to putting our resources to work in Virginia on this critical issue. As a first step, we're providing a tool kit with a wealth of materials in English and Spanish related to the rights restoration process in Virginia. **This toolkit includes our rights restoration process one-pager in English and Spanish; media talking points; social media toolkit; and tips on writing and placing op-eds on the issue.**

I look forward to working with all of you and please look for upcoming information about our Voting Rights Restoration Campaign.

Many thanks for your commitment to voting rights in Virginia,

Edgardo Cortés
Director, Virginia Voting Rights Restoration Campaign
Advancement Project

1220 L Street, NW • Suite 850 • Washington, DC 20005 • 202.728.9557 • 202.728.9558 *fax*
ap@advancementproject.org • www.advancementproject.org
LA Office: 1910 W. Sunset Boulevard • Suite 500 • Los Angeles, CA 90026 • 213.989.1300 • 213.989.1309 *fax*



Take Back My Vote: How To Restore Your Civil Rights in Virginia

Web: www.takebackmyvote.org

Call: 1-855-LET-VOTE

Twitter: #takebackmyvote

Over **450,000** Virginians have had their voting and other civil rights taken away because of a past felony conviction. Virginia is one of four states that disenfranchise citizens with felony convictions—*forever*. The only way to restore civil rights is through individual petitions approved by the Governor.

Here's what you need to know and do if you want to regain your right to vote:

1. Have your civil rights been taken away?

YES, if:

- First, you have been convicted of a crime (“guilty” under plea agreement or at trial).
- Second, if the crime of which you were convicted was a felony.
- Third, if your felony conviction was by a Virginia state or federal court (contact the “help” resources if outside VA).

2. Are you eligible?

YES, if ALL of the following apply:

- You have completed your criminal sentence and are no longer under correctional supervision (including probation, required classes, parole, etc). **This does not apply to suspended sentences if you are not regularly under probation supervision.*
- You have paid all court-ordered costs that were part of your criminal sentence (including fines, fees & restitution).
- You have waited **two years** after a non-violent conviction or **five years** after a violent conviction *from the date that you completed your sentence.*

Non-violent offenses include drug possession, petit larceny, forgery, felonious driving under the influence. Violent offenses include drug possession with intent to distribute, drug distribution or manufacturing, felonious assault, hit & run. Please check the official list at:

<http://www.commonwealth.virginia.gov/JudicialSystem/Clemency/restoration.cfm>.

- You have not had any criminal convictions (felony or misdemeanor) since your last felony conviction. **This does not include traffic infractions like speeding tickets.*

3. Which application should you complete?

- You should complete the 2-year form if you have a *non-violent conviction*.
- You should complete the 5-year form if you have a *violent conviction*.

4. How do I complete the application?

2-year application: complete each of the following steps

- Fill in your name, date of birth, address, & contact information.
- Fill in your felony convictions (as accurately as possible) and the courts where you were convicted.
- Fill in any accomplishments or responsibilities you have to share with the Governor.
- Fill in the dates of your conviction and release from supervised probation (if necessary).
- Sign the affidavit in front of a notary public.

5-year application: complete each of the following steps

- Fill in your name, date of birth, prison number, address, contact information, employer and your employer's address.
- Fill in your felony convictions, the courts where you were convicted, dates of conviction, and date when you were released from incarceration or supervision probation/parole (if necessary).
- Complete the checklist items numbered 1-8 on the second page of the application, and attach the required documents.
- Sign the affidavit in front of a notary public.

5. What other materials do I need?

2-year application

- No other materials are required but include certified sentencing orders and certified proofs of payment from each court of conviction, if possible, to make the process go faster.

5-year application

- Certified sentencing orders and certified proofs of payment from each court of conviction.
- Letter of Petition (provided).
- Letter from applicant explaining circumstances of conviction(s).
- Cover letters for three letters of reference (provided).
- Three letters of reference from non-family members.

6. What happens after I submit my application?

- Call the Secretary of the Commonwealth to confirm that your application was received and is complete.
- Wait up to 60-days for notification from the Governor.
- If your application is approved, you must register to vote by the voter registration deadline
- If you want to vote in the November 2012 presidential election, your rights must be restored **and** you must register to vote before October 15, 2012).
- If your application is rejected, there is no explanation or appeals process but you may re-apply one year after your application is rejected.

7. Where can I get more help?

- Call **1-855-LET-VOTE** (toll-free) to be directed to free 1-on-1 local assistance.
- Visit Advancement Project's website, **takebackmyvote.org**, for other self-help resources.
- Follow us at **#takebackmyvote** for rights restoration news and updates.



Reclamar mi derecho a votar: Cómo restaurar sus derechos civiles en Virginia

Web: www.takebackmyvote.org Llame: 1-855-LET-VOTE Twitter: #takebackmyvote

A más de **450,000** ciudadanos viviendo en Virginia se les ha arrebatado su derecho a votar y otros derechos civiles por haber sido condenados por un delito mayor. Virginia es uno de cuatro estados que privan del derecho a votar a los ciudadanos que hayan sido condenados por un delito mayor --- y los privan de ese derecho *para siempre*. La única forma de restaurar los derechos civiles es mediante peticiones individuales aprobadas por el Gobernador.

A continuación le indicamos lo que necesita saber y hacer si quiere recuperar su derecho a votar:

1. ¿Se le ha privado de sus derechos civiles?

SÍ, si:

- Primeramente, se le ha condenado por un delito mayor (“culpable”, ya sea mediante acuerdo con la fiscalía o en juicio).
- Segundo, si la infracción por la que fue condenado es un delito mayor.
- Tercero, si su condena por un delito mayor ocurrió en un tribunal estatal o federal de Virginia (comuníquese con los recursos de “ayuda” si ocurrió fuera de VA).

2. ¿Es usted elegible?

SÍ, si satisface TODOS los requisitos siguientes:

- Ha cumplido usted su sentencia penal y ya no se encuentra bajo supervisión correccional (inclusive probatoria, cursos obligatorios, libertad bajo palabra, etc.). ** Esto no se aplica a las sentencias suspendidas si usted no se encuentra regularmente bajo supervisión probatoria.*
- Ha pagado usted todos los costos que el tribunal dispuso y que fueron parte de su sentencia penal (inclusive multas, honorarios y restitución).
- Usted ha esperado **dos años** después de una condena por un delito mayor no violento, o **cinco años** después de una condena por un delito mayor con violencia, *contados desde la fecha en que terminó de cumplir su sentencia.*

Los delitos mayores no violentos incluyen la tenencia de drogas, hurto menor, falsificación, manejar o conducir delictivamente bajo la influencia [del alcohol o las drogas], fuga del sitio de un accidente de tránsito. Sírvase consultar la lista oficial que aparece en:

<http://www.commonwealth.virginia.gov/JudicialSystem/Clemency/restoration.cfm>.

- No ha tenido usted ninguna condena penal (por delitos menores o mayores) desde la última vez que se le condenó por un delito mayor. **Esto no incluye infracciones de tránsito tales como multas por exceso de velocidad.*

3. ¿Qué solicitud debe llenar?

- Debe llenar la solicitud de 2 años si se le *condenó por un delito mayor no violento.*
- Debe llenar la solicitud de 5 años si se le *condenó por un delito mayor con violencia.*

4. ¿Cómo lleno la solicitud?

Solicitud de 2 años: siga todos los pasos que a continuación se detallan:

- Escriba su nombre, fecha de nacimiento, e información para contactarlo.
- Enumere sus condenas por delitos mayores (con la mayor precisión posible) y los juzgados o tribunales en que fue condenado.
- Enumere los logros o responsabilidades que desea poner en conocimiento del Gobernador.
- Firme la declaración jurada (affidavit) ante notario público.

Solicitud de 5 años: siga todos los pasos que a continuación se detallan:

- Escriba su nombre, fecha de nacimiento, e información para contactarlo, su empleador, y la dirección de éste.
- Enumere sus condenas por delitos mayores (con la mayor precisión posible) y los juzgados o tribunales en que fue condenado, las fechas de las condenas, y las fechas en que fue puesto en libertad o dejó de estar bajo supervisión, probatoria, o libertad bajo palabra (de ser necesario).
- Llene los puntos 1-8 de la lista que aparece en la segunda página de la solicitud, y acompañe los documentos solicitados.
- Firme la declaración jurada (affidavit) ante notario público.

5. ¿Qué otros materiales necesito?

Solicitud de 2 años:

- No se necesitan más materiales, pero, de ser posible, incluya mandamientos certificados de imposición de condenas y pruebas certificadas de pago de cada uno de los juzgados o tribunales en que fue condenado, para agilizar los trámites.

Solicitud de 5 años:

- Mandamientos certificados de imposición de condenas y pruebas certificadas de pago de cada uno de los juzgados o tribunales en que fue condenado.
- Carta de petición (se le facilita).
- Carta del solicitante en que explica las circunstancias de la(s) condena(s).
- Cartas de remisión para tres cartas de referencias (se le facilitan).
- Tres cartas de referencias de personas que no sean miembros de su familia.

6. ¿Qué sucede después que presente mi solicitud?

- Llame al Secretario del Commonwealth para confirmar que su solicitud ha sido recibida y está completa.
- Espere hasta 60 días para recibir notificación del Gobernador.
- Si se aprueba su solicitud, debe inscribirse para votar antes del plazo establecido.
- Si quiere votar en las elecciones presidenciales de noviembre de 2012, sus derechos tienen que ser restaurados y tiene usted que inscribirse para votar antes del 15 de octubre de 2012.
- Si se deniega su solicitud, no se dan explicaciones ni hay apelación, pero puede volver a presentar su solicitud un año después de haberle sido denegada.

7. ¿Dónde puedo conseguir más ayuda?

- Llame a **1-855-LET-VOTE** (llamada gratis) y allí le indicarán dónde puede recibir atención personal en su localidad.
- Acuda a la página de Advancement Project en la internet (www.takebackmyvote.org) que ofrece otros recursos que puede utilizar.
- Síguenos en **#takebackmyvote** para mas información sobre la restauración de derechos civiles en Virginia.



TAKE BACK YOUR MY VOTE!

Messages around Re-Enfranchisement of People with Felony Convictions in Virginia

- The right to vote is the cornerstone of our democracy. Election Day is the one time we are all equal: Black, Hispanic or white, rich or poor, young or old, we all have an equal voice in the voting booth.
- Virginia permanently takes away from citizens of this fundamental right upon being convicted of a felony offense. Over 450,000 Virginians who have paid their debts to society will be unable to participate in this critical presidential election.
- Only Governor McDonnell has the power to restore voting rights and he has promised to review all applications within 60 days of receipt. People with felony convictions must start the restoration process immediately if they are to have any chance of casting a vote in this presidential election.
- One in five African Americans in Virginia is disenfranchised due to past felony conviction.
- Even if the governor approved one application every hour of every day, it would still take him 51 years to get through them all.
- Voting is our most sacred and fundamental right. Virginia must change this law and implement automatic restoration of civil rights for those who have paid their debt to society.

Compelling stories:

- Rev. Mercedes Harris got hooked on drugs while coping with the death of his brother and was in and out of prison for over a decade. But he has cleaned up his act. He has joined the ministry, become a substance abuse counselor and a community advocate, and he is in college working toward a degree in Psychology. He wants his rights restored so he can run for office one day and help people in his local community.
- Tony Suggs was on his way to becoming a champion boxer before being convicted of a felony for drug possession. Since leaving prison, he has become active in his church and is a well-respected member of his community. He had his rights restored in 2006 and has voted in every election since, large and small.

For more information and one-on-one assistance:

WWW.TAKEBACKMYVOTE.ORG

1-855-LET-VOTE



Take Back My Vote Social Media Tools

Webpage: www.takebackmyvote.org

Twitter - #takebackmyvote

Facts about the VA re-enfranchisement

- 450,000+ Virginian's have had their #voting & other #civilrights taken b/c of a past felony conviction: <http://bit.ly/LCZ9QQ> #takebackmyvote
- FACT: Virginia is one of four states that disenfranchise citizens with felony convictions—forever. #takebackmyvote <http://bit.ly/ON8xwS>
- Are you (or a loved one/friend) eligible for rights restoration in VA? Find out: <http://bit.ly/NP0Ife> #takebackmyvote
- Do you have a past felony conviction in VA? Restore your #righttovote and #civilrights. Learn how: #takebackmyvote <http://bit.ly/MN0WPo>
- If you have a past felony convictions in VA learn more about restoring your rights! <http://bit.ly/ON8xwS> #takebackmyvote #vote2012
- Help @adv_project #takebackmyvote for those w/ a past felony conviction in VA. It's not too late 2 restore ur rights! <http://bit.ly/ON8xwS>
- Do u kno some1 w/a past felony conviction in VA? Make sure they get their #votingrights restored in 2012. bit.ly/ON8xwS #takebackmyvote

Facebook:

- If your rights have been taken away because of a felony conviction, and you are interested in voting for the November election, you must restore your rights before the October 15 voter registration deadline. There's still time. Apply today! <http://bit.ly/ON8xwS>
- Help push Virginia to join the majority of states with automatic restoration. The fact is if the Governor reviewed an application an hour, 24 hours, 365 days a year, it would take 51 years to restore everyone's rights! Virginia's rights restoration is unfair and outdated. <http://bit.ly/ON8xwS>
- Did you know that the only way to restore your civil and voting rights if you have a felony conviction in Virginia is through individual petitions approved by the Governor? <http://bit.ly/ON8xwS>



Writing and Placing an Op-ed

An op-ed is an article that appears opposite the editorial page of local, state and national newspapers written by local citizens, experts, leaders of organizations – people like you. They are a powerful way for your organization to educate a large audience about your issues and to influence policymakers.

Writing an Op-Ed

Op-eds should be informative and provide practical solutions to the problem presented. They should be thought-provoking and inspire discussion and response.

The basic structure is:

- Lead (Personal stories and provocative or counterintuitive statements are most powerful.)
- Thesis
- Argument (based on evidence such as stats, scholarship or first-hand experience)
 - 1st point (lay out evidence and then form a conclusion)
 - 2nd point (lay out evidence and then form a conclusion)
 - 3rd point (lay out evidence and then form a conclusion)
- Paragraph addressing potential counter-arguments or critics
- Conclusion

Some tips to consider when writing an op-ed are:

- Op-eds are typically 750 words in length but can vary depending on the outlet. Call the outlet(s) you plan to submit it to for their guidelines.
- They should be tight, to the point, timely and well-written.
- Open with a personal story or provocative statement to illustrate why the issue should matter to readers.
- Avoid jargon and acronyms.
- For regional placement, use regional events and/or data.
- Close on a strong note. Use a short, powerful last paragraph that summarizes and drives the point home.
- Come up with a provocative title.
- Include a short biographical statement about the author at the end that explains why they are qualified to write on the topic.

Placing an Op-Ed

- Finding the right person to author your op-ed is critical to getting it placed. An affected person who can open with his or her own story, a policymaker, or other influential person is ideal.
- Contact the target newspaper(s) to find out who you should submit the op-ed to. This is usually the op-ed editor, or for smaller papers, the editorial page editor.
- If you are targeting more than one newspaper in your state, you should submit to the most prominent on an exclusive basis. Once you submit a piece, you must be rejected by them or withdraw the piece before you send it to another outlet.
- All op-eds should be accompanied by a quick note that refers to the author(s), the significance of the piece and why it's timely. Thank the editor for considering your piece.
- Include op-eds in the body of the email and never as an attachment. Emails with attachments are often caught in spam filters and those that are not will not be opened for fear of viruses.
- Follow up is key. Once sent, call the outlet to make sure they received your submission. While doing so, it's ok to make a short pitch about why the piece is particularly significant and/or timely. Ask when they will make a decision and then call again to find out whether they have decided to publish the piece. While leaving a voicemail message is fine, don't be afraid to keep trying until you reach someone.
- Don't forget to thank the editor once your piece is published. A good relationship with the editorial staff can become one of your greatest assets and you try to move your issue forward.

Best Practices for Blogs

Many of the tips for writing an op-ed apply to blogging as well but there are some differences:

- Blogs are typically shorter – a good length is 500-700 words.
- Blogs should take on a more conversational tone.
- Use hyperlinks on words that need definition and to link to other information you want the reader to check out (videos, articles, etc.) Search engines use hyperlinks to measure post importance.
- Conclusions should be action-centered. Possible calls of action might be join the conversation, share your story, or call your legislator.