

Florida's Voting Rights Restoration Act

OVERVIEW

The Voting Rights Restoration Act (VRRRA) is an amendment to the Florida State Constitution that will restore the voting rights of former felons who have committed nonviolent crimes. More than 1.5 million Floridians are unable to vote due to felon disenfranchisement laws; this number is approximately the same as every adult citizen living in Miami-Dade County. Florida is one of five states that permanently disenfranchises former felons. Nationally, 6.1 million felons are unable to vote, Florida accounts for nearly a quarter of those people.

THE CURRENT STATE OF VOTING RIGHTS IN FLORIDA

Currently, former felons have to appeal for clemency to have their voting rights reinstated. During his tenure as Governor, Charlie Crist (D) eased the process of clemency for former felons. Today, however, this process is nearly impossible. In 2011, newly appointed governor, Rick Scott, reversed changes made by Crist and created a waiting period for consideration of clemency. Since 2010, only 2,487 people have regained the right to vote. During this same period, the number of disenfranchised felons in the state grew by 150,000.

THE VRRRA: IMPACT ON ELECTIONS & COMMUNITY

The number of Florida citizens who have lost access to the ballot due to felony convictions is 10.4%. These individuals are overwhelmingly Black and Latino. Given what we know--statistically speaking--about the voting patterns of Blacks and Latinos, it goes to stand that these voters may have been able to change the results of the 2016 Presidential election.

Moreover, an analysis done by the Naples Daily News found that if those with felony convictions in the state of Florida were allowed to register to vote, nearly 258,060 would register as Democrats.

The VRRRA is not just an act that has the potential to shift the balance of political power in Florida, it is also an important tool for the reintegration of felons within their communities. A 2011 Florida government study found that people released from prison whose rights were restored were three times less likely to return to prison or supervision than counterparts without the opportunity to vote.

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RIGHTS

