Voting Rights Restoration
Support SB 6228 and HB 2292

Currently, there are thousands of people in Washington state who are living and working in our communities but are unable to vote and participate in our democracy because of a felony conviction, even though they are no longer incarcerated. The right to vote is fundamental to American democracy and our laws should encourage all eligible voters to participate, including those who have served their time.

While people with Washington State felony convictions can re-register to vote once they are no longer incarcerated or under community custody, few returning community members know this, and the process is not automatic. SB 6228 and HB 2292 strengthen our democracy by restoring automatically the right to vote as soon as a person leaves Department of Corrections (DOC) confinement and requiring DOC staff to provide written instructions for re-registering and the voter registration form itself.

Indigenous and Black voters are disproportionately impacted

The disenfranchisement of Washingtonians living in the community disproportionately impacts the state’s indigenous and Black citizens. While 3.7% of Washington’s citizens are Black, data provided by the state Department of Corrections (DOC) indicates that 12.5% of Washingtonians under community custody are Black. Similarly, while 1.3% of Washington’s citizens are Native American, 4.5% of those under supervision are Native Americans. Our democracy is strongest and most equitable when every voice is heard. It’s time to address decades of racial and economic injustice and undue restrictions that disproportionately disenfranchise voters of color.

Law enforcement officials and criminal justice experts support automatic restoration

Law enforcement officials and criminal justice experts across the nation support the automatic restoration of voting rights upon release from prison because felony disenfranchisement laws work against the long-term prospects of community reintegration. Research shows that access to the ballot increases the chances of a successful transition from the criminal legal system to society and reduces recidivism.

Clear policies reduce confusion and make elections more inclusive and easier to administer

Washington’s current law has caused confusion for election officials and prospective voters about who is eligible to vote and when, resulting in de facto disenfranchisement. SB 6228 and HB 2292 create a simple and clear rule, helping make the administration of our state elections much more fair and representative.

Washington should join other states in strengthening our democracy

Washington is falling behind the growing consensus among states. Just last year Colorado, Nevada, and New Jersey adopted laws to restore voting rights to all citizens who are not incarcerated. Hawaii, Illinois, Indiana, New York, Massachusetts, Michigan, Montana, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Utah, and the District of Columbia already provide automatic restoration after release. Maine and Vermont never take away the right to vote. By passing SB 6228 and HB 2292, Washington will be the 20th state in our constitutional republic to ensure the right to vote to all citizens no longer incarcerated. It is time to act.

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