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From Chains to Change

Democracy and Voting Rights

2017 Louisiana Legislative Session

House and Governmental Affairs Committee

Louisiana has proposed five significant bills that impact the cornerstone of democracy, where 71,000 taxpaying citizens are denied the right to vote due to a felony conviction.

SUPPORT

HB235 would put a question on the Nov. 2018 ballot, asking voters to amend the state constitution so only “incarcerated” people would be barred from voting. The constitution’s currently confusing phrase, barring people “under order of imprisonment” led to filing of *VOTE v. Louisiana* in state court on behalf of 71,000 people. HB235 needs two-thirds of both the House and Senate for the amendment to get on the ballot. Legislators don’t need to take a position on whether everyone should have voting rights; they only need to pass the question on to the people of Louisiana.

HB229 would reduce the time people under long supervision would have their voting rights suspended. HB229 suspends voting rights for five years since the time released from incarceration. People successfully integrated into the community, who are still on parole, will be able to vote. This is a step towards a strong democracy.

HB168 simply requires the Dept. of Corrections to report to the Secretary of State when someone is released from custody or supervision. This way the state can automatically restore voting rights without requiring a person to get official paperwork from one state agency merely to give it to another state agency.

HB228 would stop “prison based gerrymandering,” i.e. counting people as residents of the prison they are held inside. This would stem political power from flowing to legislative districts with prisons. Most importantly, it would stop the perverse scenario where politicians gain power by advocating directly against the interests of these “constituents.”

OPPOSE

HB256 / HB351 would propose a Nov. 2018 ballot initiative for a constitutional amendment that places a 15-year bar on people running for office, or being appointed to office, after the end of their felony sentence (and a 5-year bar after a misdemeanor). This is inherently anti-democracy, as it would keep people from electing the leaders of their choice.

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Greet, Meet, Call, and Email them TODAY!**

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