

ADVANCING JUSTICE IN LOUISIANA: POLICY PRIORITIES

VOTING RIGHTS

FOR ALL PEOPLE LIVING IN THE COMMUNITY

Issue: Louisiana’s 1974 constitution allows the state to suspend voting rights for people “under order of imprisonment.” The legislature later defined that as people on probation and/or parole. The state is currently disenfranchising 45,000 people in prison and 70,000 people living in the community.

Solution: We filed *VOTE v. Louisiana* to debate the true definition of “under order of imprisonment.” We believe that the Legislature exceeded their power under the constitution, and that the Secretary of State and Governor are enforcing an unconstitutional law. We believe that every citizen living in the community should have a voice in the laws and people that govern them.

SENTENCING, BAIL, AND PAROLE REFORMS

CREATING MEANINGFUL OPPORTUNITIES FOR RELEASE

Issues: Most arrests result in either a dismissal of charges or a sentence of community supervision. While the bulk of incarcerated individuals are sentenced between ages 17 and 25, the backlog of prison populations is aging, ailing, low-risk, with spiraling medical costs. Three Strikes laws are costly and ineffective, particularly for older people whose extreme sentence becomes a death sentence. In addition, most probation and parole violations occur in the first year following release. This wastes resources and reinforces the burdens associated with incarceration.

Solutions: We must reform systemic issues with sentencing, bail, community supervision, Good-Time Credits, and parole, and apply them to all incarcerated individuals. Eliminating “held without bail” rules will provide quicker and more affordable release, easing the loss of jobs, housing, and relationships, thus keeping families together. We must ban mandatory minimums and end Three Strikes laws, instead making “deferment” a first option for first convictions. We believe in ending all life without parole sentencing, and creating *one* parole law requiring the parole board to eventually consider every incarcerated person.

BAN THE BOX

ON ALL JOB, HOUSING, AND EDUCATION APPLICATIONS

Issue: To support full participation in the community, people need employment, housing, and civic participation. Fair and reliable access to these three pillars creates stronger communities, yet people with criminal convictions face immense barriers to a genuine second chance.

Solution: The “previous felony convictions” checkbox is a type of discrimination we must remove from not only all employment applications – public and private – but also from applications for housing, education, volunteering opportunities, voting rights, and more.

SUPPORTIVE REENTRY PROGRAMMING

BASED ON THE EXPERIENCE OF THOSE WHO HAVE DONE IT

Issue: Approximately 17,000 people are released annually from Louisiana’s prisons. Trust and goodwill are essential traits to supporting successful reentry. Current programs are structured primarily around the *monitoring* reentry model which closely controls the movements and activities of a formerly incarcerated person. Parole officers with the power of imprisonment provide this supervision, which can be fee-driven and based on punishment.

Solution: Develop *supportive* reentry programs, which create a culture of positive reinforcement and provide opportunities from people with a personal stake in positive community building.

Voice of the Experienced (VOTE) is a grassroots organization with decades of experience examining the root causes of crime, the criminal justice system, and the challenges of reentry. We take a holistic, public health approach to community problems, and strive for healthy, sustainable communities.