

# Cumberland County News

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**Dear Editor:**

Recently, the Kentucky House of Representatives passed H.B. 70, a bill that would allow Kentuckians to vote on a referendum this November to restore voting rights to former prisoners and probationers after they have completed their sentences. Our state senators should follow the House's lead and pass this bill. Kentucky is one of the last remaining states in the country that permanently disenfranchises people with criminal convictions—yes, even after they've completed their sentences—and the people of this state deserve an opportunity to end this troubling practice.

In my 40 years of experience in the criminal justice and corrections field, including 16 years as the director of the Lexington-based American Probation and Parole Association (APPA), I've learned the importance of reintegrating people into our communities after they have paid their debts to society. I strongly believe that encouraging formerly incarcerated people to engage in civic-minded activities like voting enhances public safety by strengthening the ties between these individuals and their communities.

There is no credible evidence that continuing to

disenfranchise people after they have paid their debt to society serves any legitimate law enforcement purpose. To the contrary, restoring the right to vote encourages individuals who have served their time to invest in our democracy. As a former Kentucky prosecutor, R. David Stengel, has put it, "voting shows a commitment to the future of the community." Bringing people into the political process makes them stakeholders in their communities and encourages them to lead law-abiding lives, thereby reducing recidivism.

This is precisely why the APPA passed a resolution in 2007 endorsing voting rights restoration for people with past criminal convictions after they have been released from prison. Other criminal justice and law enforcement agencies, including the Association of Paroling Authorities International and the National Black Police Association, have passed similar resolutions in recent years. Prominent members of both political parties have espoused similar views, including, just last month, GOP presidential candidate Rick Santorum.

Right now, Kentucky is one of just four states in the country that permanently disenfranchises every per-

son with a felony conviction unless the individual receives executive clemency from the governor. This archaic law affects over 125,000 Kentuckians who have completed their sentences and now live in our communities but, nevertheless, will remain barred from voting unless the governor grants each of them clemency individually. This system is backwards: in our democracy, voters should be the ones who choose their elected officials—not the other way around.

Our state senators should pass H.B. 70 right away and give us—Kentucky voters—the opportunity to end the unjustified practice of disenfranchising our friends, neighbors, and relatives even after they've served their time.

**Carl Wicklund**  
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