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New Report Calls on Kentucky Legislature to Restore Voting Rights to Kentuckians with Felony Convictions

Report highlights that 161,595 Kentuckians with felony convictions are currently disenfranchised.

LOUISVILLE, KY - Today, the League of Women Voters of Kentucky released a new report, "Restoring Voting Rights to Kentuckians with Felony Convictions," which contains the latest statistics about the state of felony disenfranchisement in Kentucky and provides recommendations for a better path forward.

The report notes that over 161,595 Kentuckians are currently unable to vote due to a felony conviction. Kentucky is one of only three states in the country that permanently bars anyone with a felony conviction from voting. The state has continued down this path despite the fact that 68% of Kentuckians support the automatic restoration of voting rights following completion of sentencing.

"It is unacceptable that 161,596 Kentuckians have been stripped of their right to vote due to a past felony conviction," said Rev. Dr. Anthony Everett, CEO, Centre for Prophetic Activism. "Restoring voting rights to all citizens with past felony convictions will benefit not only these individuals, but it will make the state of Kentucky a safer, more just, and more equitable place to live. It is time for Kentuckians to be permitted to vote on a constitutional amendment to determine whether the permanent ban on voting for people with felony convictions should be lifted. Correcting this injustice is long overdue!"

In the new report, the League of Women Voters of Kentucky makes a number of recommendations, including:

- Place a constitutional amendment on the ballot allowing Kentuckians to decide whether voting rights should be automatically restored.
- Create a coordinated government effort that fully implements Executive Order 2019-003 restoring the right to vote, including a robust public education campaign to inform, promote, assist, and provide resources in the restoration process.
- Release figures annually on the number of voting rights applications filed and the number approved.
- Provide statements of the reasons for the governor’s decisions on individual applications for reinstatement of voting rights.
- Eliminate the \$50 filing fee and the \$250 application fee for felony expungement.

More than 161,000 Kentuckians remain unable to vote despite the progress made with Executive Order 2019-003, issued by Governor Andy Beshear, which allowed nearly 200,000 persons with non-violent felony convictions to regain their voting rights.

"The data is clear: Restoring voting rights to those persons with a felony conviction creates quantifiable benefits for both the community and the individual," said Nicole D. Porter, Senior Director of Advocacy, The Sentencing Project. "The urgency of the recommendations in this report cannot be overstated. Although the current governor has pardoned thousands by executive order, that could change overnight with a new governor, who could rescind that executive order with the stroke of the pen. Kentucky needs a permanent and clear solution through a decision by the will of Kentucky citizens, not by one executive who changes every four to eight years."

The League is joined in this cause by the Kentucky Voting Rights Coalition, made up of various advocacy organizations, and the Sentencing Project, who have provided invaluable support and data for the report.

"The future of democracy in Kentucky rests on the ability of all citizens to have their voices heard. The permanent ban on voting for those with a felony conviction not only silences 161,596 Kentuckians, but it also undermines the fundamental principles of our democracy," said Fran Wagner, LWV KY President. "It is time for the legislature to take action and empower the people of Kentucky to make a choice about who has a say in our democracy."

The League of Women Voters, a nonpartisan political organization, encourages the informed and active participation of citizens in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy. As a nonpartisan body, the League takes action on issues but does not support or oppose candidates or parties. The League supports diversity, equity and inclusion in membership and programming.

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