

**League of Women Voters of Kentucky**  
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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**2017 REPORT: KENTUCKY FELONY VOTING LAW BARS OVER 312,000 FROM POLLS;  
126,000 MORE BANNED SINCE 2006 REPORT**

- **Kentucky one of four states to ban former felons from voting**
- **Kentucky #3 in rate of disenfranchisement**
- **Kentucky #1 in disenfranchisement of African Americans**
- **312,000 currently disenfranchised, 126,000 more than reported in 2006 study**

Frankfort, KY - The League of Women Voters of Kentucky released a state report today, *Felony Disenfranchisement in the Commonwealth of Kentucky* showing Kentucky has the third highest rate of citizens and the highest rate of African Americans who have lost their right to vote despite completing their full felony sentence. This report is an updated version of similar studies conducted in 2006 and 2013.

According to the report, Kentucky is one of only four states to enforce lifetime voting bans on all persons with felony convictions resulting in the disenfranchisement of over 312,000 residents. This is an increase of more than 68,000 since the figures reported by the League in 2013 and 126,000 since the 2006 report.

One of every 11 adults in Kentucky is ineligible to vote due to a previous felony conviction, a rate of 9.1 percent, nearly three times the national average of 2.47 percent or one in 40. Among African Americans, almost one in four is disenfranchised, a rate of 26.2 percent, more than triple the national rate of 9.1 percent. The report also finds that 92 percent of those disenfranchised live in the community and 78 percent have completed their full sentence.

In 2001, the Kentucky General Assembly passed legislation to simplify voter restoration for people with previous convictions resulting in an increase in restoration of voting rights, from 831 in 2000 to 1,231 in 2003. After a 2004 change in gubernatorial policy requiring an essay and three character references, there was a dramatic decline in applications and approvals to 164 in 2006. Changes in 2008 with a new governor, resulted in an improvement in the numbers, 10,479 between 2008 and 2015.

In 2015, then-Gov. Steve Beshear issued an order that restored voting rights to individuals with non-violent felony convictions who had completed their sentences and met other criteria. That order also established a process by which qualifying citizens' voting rights would be restored as they completed

their sentences. In late 2015 Gov. Matt Bevin rescinded that order and replaced it with Kentucky's prior procedure. That procedure requires individuals who have completed their full sentence to submit an application detailing their convictions and sentences served. As of October 2016, no restoration orders had been issued.

Enactment of House Bill 40 in 2016 allowed persons with certain Class D felony convictions to have those convictions vacated and expunged. Since the law took effect in July, fewer than 389 persons have had their voting rights restored.

The League has a longstanding belief that "voting is a fundamental expression of citizenship and every citizen of our Commonwealth should be protected in the right to vote," according to the new report. Kentucky League co-president, Dr. Terry Naydan said, "When we show felons who have paid their debt to society that they are allowed to vote, we are saying that they are citizens again. Studies show that the rate of recidivism goes down when a felon feels he/she can fully participate in our democracy."

League recommendations include providing:

- A ballot measure to allow Kentucky voters to decide whether people living in the community and who have completed their full sentence have their voting rights restored automatically
- Increased assistance to eligible persons with the restoration of voting rights application process
- Increasing public education about the process of restoring voting rights and available resources to help those wishing to vote
- Annual release of data on the number of people applying for restoration of voting rights and expungement of felony records and the number approved and denied
- Reduction and/or waiver of the \$500 application fee for expungement of felony records.

"The League was created by women who struggled many years seeking the right to vote," said Nita Smith, co-president of the state League. "We believe citizens who have made a mistake should have that right reinstated once they have completed their full sentence and/or parole. The League of Women Voters believes that our society is stronger when all of our citizens vote."

The state League of Women Voters takes positions only after deliberation and consensus from local Leagues across the state.

The report, *Felony Disenfranchisement in the Commonwealth of Kentucky: A Report of the League of Women Voters of Kentucky, February 2017* along with the 2006 and 2013 reports are available at [lwvky.org/about/publications/](http://lwvky.org/about/publications/).

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*The League of Women Voters of Kentucky, 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. Members include both women and men.*