

# REENTRY SPOTLIGHT | Voting Rights for Individuals Involved in the Criminal Legal System



## Why Voting Rights Are Essential

Voting is the language of American democracy and is a deeply enshrined right in the U.S. Constitution, protected by five separate Amendments. The ability to participate in civic life—to have a voice in choosing the elected officials whose decisions impact our lives, families, and communities—is fundamental to American citizenship.

The right to vote is particularly important in shaping perceptions of the due process of law, which serves to both protect and, in some cases, restrict the individual autonomy of citizens. For individuals exiting prisons and jails after a period of incarceration, restoring the right to vote and maintaining that right supports full community reintegration. Doing so not only increases civic participation broadly across communities but, more specifically, demonstrates to individuals currently or previously involved with the criminal legal system that their voice does matter. The right to vote provides them the opportunity to fully engage in American democracy.

**Three out of four people disenfranchised** are living in their communities, having fully completed their sentences or remaining supervised while on probation or parole.

—The Sentencing Project (2022)

## State Spotlight



**CALIFORNIA:** In 2023, California assemblyman Isaac Bryan introduced an amendment to the state's constitution that would grant people with felony convictions in California the right to vote while in prison. [Learn more.](#)



**MINNESOTA:** In 2023, the Minnesota State Senate approved a bill to restore voting rights to convicted felons as soon as they get out of prison instead of continuing to require them to complete their parole before they can cast a ballot. [Learn more.](#)

This Reentry Spotlight shares resources addressing voting rights and voter disenfranchisement to inform: (1) individuals directly and indirectly impacted by the criminal legal system, (2) practitioners working with people impacted by the criminal legal system, and (3) policymakers interested in laws and regulations that impact voting rights for people currently or previously involved in the criminal legal system.

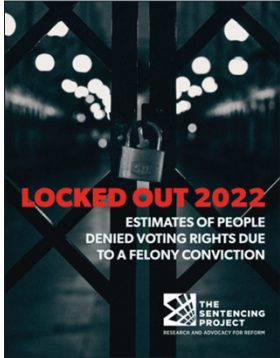


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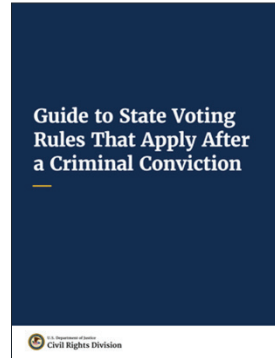
## Key Voting Rights Resources

Readers who want to understand the recent public policy landscape and current opportunities and restrictions regarding voter disenfranchisement for Americans impacted by the criminal legal system are encouraged to examine two recent publications presented here:



### [Locked Out 2022](#)

*The Sentencing Project*  
(October 2022)



### [Guide to State Voting Rules That Apply After a Criminal Conviction](#)

*U.S. Department of Justice,*  
*Civil Rights Division*  
(June 2022)

This 2022 report updates and expands on 20 years of work chronicling the scope and distribution of felony disenfranchisement in the United States; presents national and state estimates of the number and percentage of people disenfranchised due to felony convictions; and provides the number and percentage of Black and Latino populations impacted.

**Key features:** State inventory of voting restrictions; voting restriction trends (race/ethnicity and gender variation); recent law changes

This document is designed to help citizens who meet the age and residency requirements understand how the state-by-state rules about voting after a criminal conviction could apply to them. The guide walks readers through a series of questions to help them understand how each state's laws work and gives information about how to reach officials in a particular state if someone wants to register to vote or has additional questions.

**Key features:** State-specific detailed information on voting eligibility; contact information for voting information and support in each state



## Understanding the Impact of a Criminal Record on Voting Rights

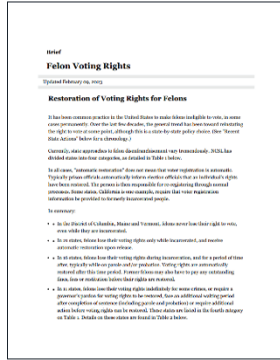
The laws and regulations related to voting rights for individuals with a criminal record vary from state to state, and finding information on how voting may be impacted in your state can be difficult. The NRRC's *National Inventory of Collateral Consequences of Conviction (NICCC)* provides an online searchable database of state laws and regulations related to voting rights and other civic participation. Find the laws and regulations most relevant to you at [niccc.nationalreentryresourcecenter.org](https://niccc.nationalreentryresourcecenter.org).

Are you looking for information on how voting rights can be restored by clearing a criminal record? The NRRC's *Clean Slate Clearinghouse* details information on juvenile and adult criminal record clearance policies in all U.S. states and territories. Find out more at [cleanslateclearinghouse.org](https://cleanslateclearinghouse.org).



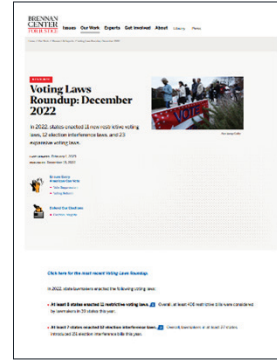
# Additional Resources

Readers seeking additional information on the challenges and opportunities regarding access to voting rights for citizens with a criminal conviction might also be interested in these publications:



## [Felon Voting Rights](#)

*National Conference of State Legislatures (February 2023)*

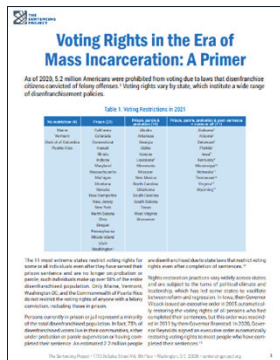


## [Voting Rights Roundup: December 2022](#)

*Brennan Center for Justice (February 2023)*

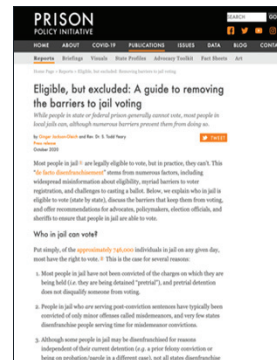
This brief discusses the loss of voting rights while incarcerated, and until completion of sentence (parole and/or probation).

This report identifies and summarizes changes to statutes during 2022, during which states enacted 11 new restrictive voting laws, 12 election interference laws, and 23 expansive voting laws.



## [Voting Rights in the Era of Mass Incarceration: A Primer](#)

*The Sentencing Project (August 2022)*



## [Eligible, but excluded: A guide to removing the barriers to jail voting](#)

*Prison Policy Initiative (October 2020)*

This report examines state-by-state variations in voting rights and describes policies affecting citizens convicted of felony offenses.

This report explains who in jail is eligible to vote (state by state), discusses the barriers that keep them from voting, and offers recommendations for advocates, policymakers, election officials, and sheriffs to ensure that people in jail can vote.

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