

IN SUPPORT OF WISCONSIN DRAFT LEGISLATIVE REFERENCE BUREAU (LRB) BILL 1522/P1 THAT SEEKS TO RESTORE VOTING RIGHTS TO PEOPLE ON PROBATION AND PAROLE AND DECREASE FELONY DISENFRANCHISEMENT IN THE STATE OF WISCONSIN

WHEREAS, felony disenfranchisement is defined as the loss of a person's voting rights due to a felony conviction; and

WHEREAS, in the state of Wisconsin a person is not eligible to vote if they have been convicted of a felony and currently serving any portion of their sentence including extended supervision, probation and/or parole; and

WHEREAS, rates of disenfranchisement vary drastically by state due to broad variations in voting prohibitions; and

WHEREAS, as reported by The Sentencing Project, 30 states deny voting rights to felony probationers, 34 states disenfranchise parolees, and 12 states deny voting rights to some or all individuals who have successfully fulfilled their prison, parole or probation sentence; and

WHEREAS, Maine and Vermont are the only two states that do not disenfranchise felons; and

WHEREAS, as of December 2016, the Bureau of Justice Statistics reported there were an estimated 4.5 million adults in the U.S. under community supervision, probation or parole and, of that amount, 64,900 were residents of the state of Wisconsin; and

WHEREAS, the Ex-Incarcerated People Organizing (EXPO) group reports in 2016 that the average length of stay for parole in Wisconsin was estimated to be 38 months or a little over three years; that makes Wisconsin third nationally for probation and parole sentences as reported by the EXPO group; and

WHEREAS, the EXPO group further reports that the average duration for parole across all states is estimated to be 22 months; and

WHEREAS, a report by the Advancement Project titled *Democracy Disappeared: How Florida Silences the Black Vote through Felony Disenfranchisement* published October 2018, suggests that the consequences of felony disenfranchisement disproportionately impact poor communities and communities of color, which are likely to have high concentrations of returning citizens who are disenfranchised; and

WHEREAS, the report further indicates that losing the right to vote is linked to socio-economic conditions; felony disenfranchisement converges with low income, poverty, limited education and employment opportunities to disempower entire communities; and

WHEREAS, the inability for disenfranchised people convicted of a felony to participate in the political process limits their power to overcome inequality and systemic injustice and isolates them from society; and

WHEREAS, the Advancement Project reports that when large numbers of citizens are not allowed to vote, entire constituencies may go unrepresented in the democratic institutions that govern them; and

WHEREAS, under Wisconsin Legislative Reference Bureau (LRB) draft legislation 1522/P1, a person would lose his or her right to vote based on a disqualifying offense only while he or she is incarcerated for that offense, and a person that is released to extended supervision or parole may resume voting; and

WHEREAS, additionally, LRB 1522/P1 would allow a person convicted of a disqualifying offense and on probation retain his or her right to vote unless he or she is confined as a condition of probation; and

WHEREAS, EXPO, Wisconsin Affiliate of the Gamaliel Foundation (WISDOM), the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), Project Return, Wisconsin Voices, League of Women Voters and Just Leadership USA plans to launch the “Unlock the Vote” Campaign seeking to reengage 64,900 disenfranchised voters; and

WHEREAS, felony disenfranchisement is a major social issue across the United States that adversely affects more than 4 million people, including 64,900 people in the state of Wisconsin, as it is a constitutional right that every citizen should be allowed the right to vote;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Eau Claire County Board of Supervisors supports Wisconsin Legislative Reference Bureau (LRB) draft legislation 1522/P1 that seeks to restore voting rights to disenfranchised felons and efforts to reduce felony disenfranchisement and reform practices that disproportionately impact communities of color in Wisconsin and the United States; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Eau Claire County Board of Supervisors supports a comprehensive review and revision of Wisconsin’s sentencing guidelines, parole processes, and revocation processes to ensure that best practices are being followed; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Eau Claire County Board of Supervisors supports LRB 1522/P1, which is anticipated to be introduced soon, and requests Government Affairs staff to communicate this position to the Wisconsin State Legislature and the Governor in support of its passage.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Eau Claire County Board of Supervisors is requesting the support of all Wisconsin State Legislators, the Governor, and the Wisconsin Counties association. The County Clerk is directed to forward a copy of this resolution to the Legislature for the State of Wisconsin, the office of the Governor, and the Wisconsin Counties Association.

ADOPTED: September 17, 2019

Janet K. Loomis  
County Clerk