



Advocacy Team Position Paper – 2019

RESTORING FELON VOTING RIGHTS

SUMMARY OF POSITION: The United Methodist Church believes that persons who have been convicted of a felony and have served their sentence should have their voting rights restored.

PROPOSED AMENDMENT TO THE STATE CONSTITUTION (Currently 2019 House Study Bill 68 or HSB68)

(PROPOSED GOVERNOR RESOLUTION) **JOINT RESOLUTION**

Section 1. The following amendment to the Constitution of the State of Iowa is proposed:

Section 5 of Article II of the Constitution of the State of Iowa, as amended by the amendment of 2008, is amended to read as follows: 5 Sec. 5. **Disqualified persons.** A person adjudged mentally incompetent to vote or a person convicted of any ~~infamous crime~~ felony who has not discharged his or her sentence shall not be entitled to the privilege of an elector.

EXPLANATION: *The amendment provides that a person who is convicted of a felony is not entitled to the privileges of an elector until that person discharges his or her sentence. Under current law, a person convicted of any infamous crime is not entitled to the privileges of an elector unless that person's rights are restored by the governor.*

United Methodist Official Statements¹

Communities benefit if people leaving incarceration are successful in their reintegration and do not return to criminal behavior. . . Discrimination against people with criminal records must not be tolerated. . . Moreover, **laws that exclude any persons with a criminal record from the normal benefits and rights of citizenship, including** publicly financed income assistance and housing, student loans, and **voting rights should be ended.**

We call upon the General Board of Church and Society to mobilize United Methodist churches to advocate for legislation that will eliminate racism and classism in the criminal-justice system; ensure equality, transparency, and fairness; and protect the human rights of all adults and children by: . . . creating laws prohibiting discrimination against people with criminal records; and **restoring voting rights for people with criminal records.** (*emphasis added*) (*passed by the 2016 General Conference of The United Methodist Church*)

¹The Book of Resolution of the United Methodist Church, 2016; Resolution 5031, "Humanizing Criminal Justice" *Exiting Incarceration*, pp. 495-497.

FOR MORE INFORMATION: Contact Brian Carter – briancar@dwx.com; Sheila Corsbie-sjcorsbie@gmail.com; Rita Carter - ritaac@mchsi.com; or Gary Nims- gary.nims@gmail.com;
Iowa Conference of The United Methodist Church LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY TEAM

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

An article in The Conversation November 7, 2018 by Assistant Professor Victoria Shineman of the University of Pittsburgh shared her research which indicated the restoring of voting rights made felons more likely to reintegrate into society and avoid returning to crime.

*“Voters in **Florida** approved a ballot measure . . . that restores voting rights to citizens with felony convictions once they have completed their full sentence. . . . more than 64 percent of Florida voters voted in favor of the amendment – well above the 60 percent support that was needed for it to pass. . .*

*“My research finds that when **Virginia** restored voting rights, ex-offenders became more trusting of government and the criminal justice system. These attitudes are known to make it easier for citizens to re-enter society after being released from prison and also decrease their tendency to commit additional crimes. . . I went to Virginia during the November 2017 statewide election. . . I recruited a sample of 93 citizens with felony convictions to complete two surveys – one before the election, and one after.*

*“Citizens who were told. . . their voting rights had been restored became more trusting of government and the criminal justice system compared to those who were not provided with this information. . . These findings corroborate results from another study I conducted in November 2014. The earlier study similarly informed some citizens with felony convictions **in Ohio** that their voting rights had been restored. Compared to another group who was not provided with this information, subjects who were informed that their voting rights had been restored reported higher trust in the government and the police.*

*“These trusting and pro-democratic attitudes are known to help citizens reintegrate into their communities upon release from prison. **Research suggests citizens returning from prison reintegrate more successfully if they are able to transition from an identity as a “criminal” to an identity of a “law-abiding citizen.”***

“There are other studies that have found a relationship between voting rights and lower crime. But none of them have yet been able to test whether restoring voting rights causes crime to decrease as mine does.

*“My research provides the first causal evidence **that restoring voting rights causes ex-offenders to develop the very attitudes and behaviors that make them more likely to successfully reintegrate into society and avoid returning to crime and prison.**” (emphasis added)*

Talking Points from the League of Women Voters of Iowa (2018)

- Iowa and Kentucky are the only states that permanently ban all felons from voting unless restored by Governor
 - Requires felon to:
 - Complete sentence, parole or supervised release
 - Have an up-to-date schedule for paying all court costs, restitution and fines
 - Gather considerable information at considerable expense
 - Submit application and supporting documents to Governor
- Those affected
 - At least 52,000 persons as of Nov 2018 (about 2% of Iowa population)
 - Nearly 7,000 or 13% are African-American,
- No compelling governmental purpose of safety is served by denying voting rights
 - Voting reduces recidivism
 - Civic participation instills in the offender a feeling of belonging in the community and a sense of responsibility toward it (Project Vote)
- The use of executive orders to restore rights varies with the governor
 - Persons are not treated equally