



Bill Summary

Voter Restoration of Rights for Formerly Incarcerated Tennesseans

HB 547

Sponsor: Rep. Michael Curcio (R)

SB 589

Sponsor: Sen. Steve Dickerson (R)

This bill amends Tennessee Code Annotated, Section 2-2-102 and Title 40, Chapter 29. This bill restores the voting rights of persons convicted of certain infamous crimes upon receipt of a pardon or completion of any sentence of incarceration, parole, or probation..

Fiscal Note: Increase State Expenditures - \$56,000 (Recurring); Increases Local Expenditures – Exceeds \$100,000 (One-time)

Bill Description:

Under present law, a person who is convicted of a felony is disqualified from voting in Tennessee. A convicted felon who has paid any court-ordered restitution, paid all court costs, and is current on any applicable child support obligation may apply to have their voting rights restored. A person must provide a copy of a court order or a certificate of restoration to the administrator of elections and state coordinator of elections in order to register to vote.

Removes Financial Obligations

- Voting rights must not be denied based on inability or failure to pay civil or criminal penalties, court fees, restitution, or child support

Streamlines Restoration Process

- Bill removes administrative inefficiency and puts burden on the State to provide certificate of voting rights.
- Requires releasing authority to issue certificate of restoration so that a person no longer has to request one.
- Requires releasing administrator to verify applicant's eligibility with the Secretary of State.
- Requires Tennessee Dept. of Corrections to inform at least twice a month the Secretary of State who is newly eligible to register to vote.

Why This Bill Matters:

- Over 421,000 Tennesseans—who have successfully completed their sentences and are living, working, and paying taxes in their communities—cannot vote due to a past felony conviction.
- Streamlining the process preserves resources for the courts and clerks and leads to small government
- Giving a person the right to vote reduces recidivism, saves taxpayer dollars, improves self-worth and dignity, and reintegrates them back into citizenship.

BY THE NUMBERS

- **91%** of Tennessee voters support criminal justice reform
- **1 in 5** African Americans cannot vote due to a past felony conviction.
- Tennessee is the **only** state that requires all court-ordered child support to be paid as a condition of voting rights.
- Only **11,581** (28%) Tennesseans have completed the process to restore their voting rights from 1990-2015.

Sources: Think Tennessee, Sycamore Institute, Public Opinion Strategies poll data (March 2019)