



ACLU OF WISCONSIN FOUNDATION
Restore the Vote WI Coalition
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Coalition Calls for Major WI Election Law Reform on Heels of Overwhelming Public Support

Say Wisconsin's Disfranchisement Laws are Outdated, Un-American and Unfair

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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DATE: Monday, April 7th, 2008

MILWAUKEE: In last week's general election in Wisconsin, over 40,000 people who live, work, go to school, pay taxes and raise families in our community were prohibited from voting.

Today the Restore the Vote WI Coalition announced its formal launch. ACLU of Wisconsin Foundation led the effort to form the coalition to advance grassroots public education on felon enfranchisement in the Wisconsin community.

In October 2007 civic, faith-based and social service organizations both statewide and in the greater Milwaukee and Madison areas began to discuss the issue of felon disfranchisement in Wisconsin. Since then the number of organizations in Wisconsin and nationally joining the coalition is nearly 40 and growing weekly.

The coalition believes that felons who have served their time in prison should be allowed to vote immediately upon release into their communities as they do in Illinois, Ohio, Indiana, Michigan and 12 other states around the country.

Milwaukee County residents overwhelmingly agree. In a poll¹ taken last fall on this issue, the results showed a mandate for the legislature to act on this issue.

- Over two-thirds (70%) of Milwaukee County's residents— expressed support the restoration of voting rights for people with convictions when they complete their term of imprisonment.
- Restoration of voting rights is not a partisan issue - 63% of Milwaukee County's Republicans support this type of legislation, as do 66% of self-identified conservatives and 70% of self-identified moderates.
- It is interesting that no matter how the results are sorted demographically, support for automatic, post-incarceration rights restoration stays well above 55% in any poll cross section.

“A diverse array of organizations, representing tens of thousands of Wisconsinites statewide, has come together for this issue. This is a testament to the importance of repealing this voting barrier in Wisconsin,” said Andrea Kaminski, Executive Director of the League of Women Voters of Wisconsin.

Organizations that have joined the coalition include: ACLU of Wisconsin Foundation, ACLU Racial Justice Project, 9 to 5 National Association of Working Women, NAACP – Milwaukee Branch,

¹The poll was conducted by Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin and Associates, an Opinion research and public policy analysis firm in Madison, WI in a phone survey done October 13- 22, 2007. Those polled included, which was weighted to reflect population of Milwaukee County, registered voters throughout Milwaukee County interviewed, including: 527 interviews conducted in the City of Milwaukee, with an over sample of: 149 Latino voters and 152 African-American voters. 217 interviews were conducted in Suburban Milwaukee County. Margin of error for the entire sample is +/- 3.7%.

NAACP – Wisconsin State Office, Citizen Action of Milwaukee, Citizen Action of Wisconsin, League of Women Voters of Wisconsin, Campaign Against Violence, Grassroots Northshore, Wisconsin Women’s Network-Women in Prison Task Force, ACORN-Wisconsin, SEIU-AFRAM and Voces de la Frontera, Liberty Tree Foundation, Veterans for Peace-local 102 (Cudahy), League of Women Voters of Wisconsin, Faith Community Workers for Justice (a project of the WI AFL-CIO), Citizen Action of Milwaukee – Faith-based Caucus, WI-CURE (WI-Citizens United to Rehabilitate Errants), Institute for One Wisconsin, Voices Beyond Bars a project of Madison area Urban Ministries, Project Return, Racine Dominican Justice and Rights Commission, The Sentencing Project, National Black Police Association, Urban Underground, Milwaukee LGBT Community Center, National Lawyers Guild-Milwaukee Chapter, Vessels of God, American Associate of Probation and Parole Officers, Community Connections, Wisconsin Network for Peace and Justice, Peace Education Project of Peace Action-Wisconsin and WISDOM.

According to Kaminski, restoring the vote to felons will also make election administration more efficient. “If you can walk in the door at the polling place, you are not disqualified because of a felony. This will clarify eligibility requirements for election officials, who have a lot of responsibility and pressure in a high-turnout election,” she said.

Current Wisconsin law provides that felons who have been released from prison and those whose crimes were not serious enough to even warrant prison must wait their entire term of probation or parole before their right to vote is restored. “People could be rebuilding their lives for 1, 5, 10, or even 30 years and not be able to for example choose the school board member who will make critical decisions about their child’s education.”, said Renee Crawford, Associate Director of the ACLU of Wisconsin.

Crawford concluded, “People work and pay taxes and yet do not have representation in their own government. Taxation without representation is fundamentally un-American. Our country was founded on the basic principle that a system of government without the voices of all of its citizens is fundamentally unfair and flawed. It’s time Wisconsin’s Jim Crow voting ban be lifted.”

The ACLU of Wisconsin Foundation is a non-profit non-partisan civil liberties and civil rights organization working to protect the rights of Wisconsinites.