



THE FORGOTTEN YOUTH

The impact of felony disenfranchisement
on young Illinoisans

Chicago  Votes

BACKSTORY

Chicago Votes was founded with a simple mission: break down barriers young people face to civic participation. Among the many barriers young people face is contact with the legal system.

Young people are overrepresented in jails and prisons throughout the United States.

Once incarcerated, people face additional hurdles to civic engagement- namely, felony disenfranchisement.

In 2019, Chicago Votes helped to pass Voting in Jails, ensuring access to the ballot in jails, and Civics in Prison, requiring peer-taught civics classes in Illinois prisons.

Now, we are working to restore voting rights to people in Illinois prisons with the passage of House Bill 39.

WHAT IS FELONY DISENFRANCHISEMENT?

Felony disenfranchisement is the prohibition or suspension of voting rights for individuals with felony convictions.

Forty-eight states in the U.S. have felony disenfranchisement laws. Maine, Vermont, Washington D.C., and Puerto Rico allow people in prison to vote.

FOR EXAMPLE:

In Illinois, people in prison are denied the right to vote.

In a number of states people with felony convictions cannot vote, even after serving their sentence.

WHAT IS BILL HOUSE BILL 39?

In Illinois, people in prison are prohibited from voting.

If passed, House Bill 39 (HB 39) would restore voting rights to people post-conviction in prison. It would provide the roughly 30,000 people in Illinois prisons access to the ballot.

When people in prison cannot vote, influence policy, or hold elected officials accountable, things like inhumane prison conditions, problematic judges, and “tough-on-crime” policies persist more easily.

**INDIVIDUALS RANGING BETWEEN
THE AGES OF 18-35 MAKE UP THE
LARGEST DEMOGRAPHIC OF
INCARCERATED CITIZENS.**

AGE

**% OF STATE
PRISON
POPULATION**

18-24

7.96%

25-29

15.51%

30-35

18.79%

**18 - 35 year olds represent 43% of the
Illinois prison population.**

THE IMPACTS OF FELONY DISENFRANCHISEMENT ON ILLINOIS' CHILDREN

80% OF WOMEN IN
ILLINOIS PRISONS
ARE MOTHERS.

In Illinois, approximately 100,000 children are currently denied an advocate at the ballot box due to their parent's incarceration.

Nationally, 2.7 MILLION children have a parent serving time in prison or jail on any given day.

"[Denying voting rights to people in prisons] means there's no one to vote on services vital to the success of these children including educational curriculum, school rules, where parks and playgrounds are located, bus routes, if any, and whether they will have access to stable housing, along with, clean water and clean air."

-Avalon Betts-Gaston, formerly incarcerated mother and project manager at the Illinois Alliance for Justice & Reentry

IMPACTS OF FELONY DISENFRANCHISEMENT

"The disenfranchisement of incarcerated people is one of the biggest obstacles to criminal justice reform that our country faces. When an individual is behind bars, they are effectively voiceless. They do not have the ability to change the system that has harmed them. But by giving people behind the wall an opportunity to cast their ballot, we can give them their voice back. We can give them a say in the system that has led to their own imprisonment."

Jeremiah Mung

More Than Our Crimes

FROM COMMUNITY
MEMBERS IN ILLINOIS
PRISONS



Are we not still human beings - are we not still alive and breathing - are we not still people who have made wrong decisions and are imperfect - are we not still U.S. Citizens?

We are the missing Link.!

Theophil Encalado, incarcerated in Stateville C.C.

If our bodies are valuable

In our democracy, then so should our minds and hearts be legislatively and socially recognized and treated as equally valuable to our democracy.

Marcos Ramirez, formerly incarcerated in Stateville C.C.

What better place to educate these mostly young (18-30) men and women of mostly urban minority ethnicity that make up much of the incarcerated population, whose elected officials set the policies


Scott Parker, incarcerated in Stateville C.C.

Most of us are extensions of our families. And will someday return to society. Some of us to the same communities. Being able to vote allows us to help change the very circumstances that filtered most of us through this system. A lot

David Wales, incarcerated in Stateville C.C.

Support Prisoners Right to
Vote.

Dimitreus Thomas, incarcerated in Stateville C.C.

A portrait of Frederique Desrosiers, a woman with curly hair and glasses, speaking. The background is slightly blurred, showing what appears to be a poster with the name 'Abraham' visible.

"We know that the offices on the ballot directly impact people who are incarcerated from the moment they are booked to the moment they are done serving their sentence, and afterwards. The offices on the ballot impact the standard of living in prison, healthcare accessibility, the availability of reentry services, and the ability to have access to menstrual products and clean and safe drinking water. Senate Bill 828 can't wait."

-Frederique Desrosiers, Chicago
Votes Policy Manager