

Black Votes Matter
UNO Adjunct Professor, Preston Love Jr.
Prestonlovejr.com

Black Lives, Black Poverty and Black Votes Matter

Nebraska Felons “Let My People Go”

The Nebraska Senate, thanks to new State Senator Justin Wayne’s Bill (LB75), is considering reducing the wait time for Felons to be able to vote in Nebraska. Currently Nebraska requires a Felon to wait two (2) years after they are released from prison and/or are released from probation restrictions, (commonly called being on paper), before they can vote. Wayne’s Bill would reduce the time to zero wait time. Let me be clear the felons have satisfied their “debt” to society and yet they cannot vote. Nebraska, come on “Let My People Go”, let them vote.

Let’s consider some of the facts (source Nebraska For Civic Reform):

1. Nebraska disenfranchises more than 7,000 citizens with felony convictions who have completed their sentence. The total number of disenfranchised Nebraskans totals more than 17,500 residents.
2. Nebraska is one of 12 states with the most restrictive disenfranchisement laws in the country. It is one of only three states that impose a waiting period after person’s have completed their criminal sentence.
3. One of every 18 (5.6%) black Nebraskans is disenfranchised, compared to 1 of every 81 (1.2%) total adults in the state.

NEBRASKA DISENFRANCHISEMENT POLICY NATIONAL

Nebraska is one of three states (including Delaware and Wyoming) which impose a waiting period after completion of sentence before restoring the right to vote. Prior to 2005 Nebraska had an indefinite ban on voting rights for those with felony convictions. However, in 2005 the legislature replaced that this policy with a two-year waiting period for voting rights restoration.

PUBLIC SAFETY AND RESTORATION POLICIES

Restoring civil rights, such as the right to vote, may encourage greater stability among formerly incarcerated individuals. Expanding the franchise to persons with felony convictions can assist them

transition back into the community as well as promote public safety. By disenfranchising individuals

with felony convictions, we are further isolating them from participation in civil society. Voting can

instill a sense of obligation and responsibility to one’s community. Individuals who feel a connection to their community members are less likely to victimize others.¹ In one study, among individuals who had been arrested previously, 27% of non-voters were rearrested, as opposed to only 12% of voters.

NEBRASKA IN THE NATIONAL CONTEXT

Nebraska is one of 12 states that disenfranchises people after they have completed their sentence. The proportion of the population ineligible to vote is 1.23%, or one out of every 81 residents. This felony disenfranchisement dilutes democracy, making it imperative we actively work to have all voting aged people participate in this civic duty.

RACIAL IMPACT

While whites comprise 89.1% of Nebraska's population,³ and African Americans make up 4.6% of the population, 26.9% of the Nebraska prison population is African American.⁴ Moreover, racial disparity in Nebraska's criminal justice system outpaces national rates. While the average rate of black male incarceration in the United States is 1 in 26, the average in Nebraska is 1 in 22. Nebraska also, has a higher state average rate of overall black adult incarceration. The national incarceration rate, per 100,000 is 1,408 while Nebraska's average is 1,650. However, Nebraska is below the state average for Hispanic incarceration with 359 per 100,000 as opposed to the state average of 378.⁵

Also, let me quote from a recent letter sent to me from an ex-felon:

"...Within a year of my release, I had professional employment, an associate degree and on track for my Bachelor's Degree. I was paying rent, taxes, taking care of my family. But still I was a second-class citizen, I could not vote"

I have encountered scores of ex-felons who share this same story, it's time for Nebraska to catch up and let ex-felons vote immediately when released.

As of this writing the state senate passed the Bill (LB75), but the Governor is expected to veto it. The legislature can override with 30 votes. We share see!!!

To review previous Black Votes Matter column articles, visit Omahastar.com. Or prestonlovejr.com. Preston love can be reached at prestonlovejr@gmail.com