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Pro-Democracy Groups Sue Louisiana Over Inequitable Felony Disenfranchisement Scheme

Baton Rouge, LA — Today, the League of Women Voters of Louisiana (LWV of Louisiana), along with Voice of the Experienced (VOTE) and the Power Coalition for Equity and Justice (Power Coalition), filed a [lawsuit](#), with representation from Campaign Legal Center (CLC) and Bill Quigley of Loyola University Law School, asking the US District Court for the Middle District of Louisiana to declare a part of the state’s felony disenfranchisement scheme unconstitutional and illegal under federal voting rights law.

“Voting should be a simple, accessible process for all Louisianans, including those with prior felony convictions,” said **M. Christian Green**, president of the League of Women Voters of Louisiana. “Our state’s current process places an unnecessary burden on Louisiana voters and only hinders their ability to participate fully in our democracy. Restoration of voting rights is an essential part of full participation in society for those with past felony convictions.”

Currently, Louisianans who were removed from the voter rolls because of a felony conviction cannot register when they become eligible unless they present additional documentation from the Department of Public Safety and Corrections (DPSC), which can be difficult to obtain. This paperwork is an unnecessary burden because DPSC already provides election officials with the information to confirm registrants’ eligibility after a felony conviction.

Moreover, individuals with past felony convictions who had not been previously registered to vote have no such paperwork requirement. Tens of thousands of Louisianans with past felony convictions whose voting rights have been restored could be denied registration because of this policy.

“Voting should never be a burden”, said **Celina Stewart**, chief counsel and senior director of advocacy and litigation at the League of Women Voters of the US. “Louisiana's current policy imposes inequitable barriers on voters with past felony convictions and clearly violates the letter and purpose of the *National Voter Registration Act*. Every eligible voter deserves equal access to the ballot, free from unnecessary obstruction and arbitrary processes that further disenfranchise them.”

This burdensome additional requirement and arbitrary treatment of people with felony convictions who are attempting to re-register to vote violate the *National Voter Registration Act (NVRA)* and the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment. The NVRA prohibits states from creating additional documentation requirements to register to vote beyond the voter registration form itself.

The lawsuit asks the court to remove arbitrary state-imposed barriers that disenfranchise formerly incarcerated individuals.

“Louisiana's arbitrary and unnecessary requirement for formerly incarcerated people attempting to re-register to vote denies them a full and equal voice in the political process and perpetuates longstanding disparities in democratic participation,” said **Paul Smith**, senior vice president at Campaign Legal Center.

“Some people finished their sentences decades ago, and are being told to see their parole officer and get paperwork. Others have only ever been on probation, and should never have been suspended at all. Ultimately, it is a waste of everyone’s resources to try and help one person after another navigate a redundant requirement,” said **Bruce Reilly**, deputy director of Voice of the Experienced (VOTE).

“We have stood with our founding and anchor partner, Voice of the Experienced, from the beginning with the passage of Act 636, re-enfranchising formerly incarcerated voters,” said **Ashley Shelton**, founder, president and CEO of the Power Coalition for Equity and Justice. “The legislature did the right thing by restoring rights and it is just as important to do it the right way, in compliance with the NVRA. We waste the time of citizens and advocates when we overcomplicate what federal law has already protected.”

[The complaint can be found here.](#) Read this press release online [here](#).

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[The League of Women Voters](#) envisions a democracy where every person has the desire, the right, the knowledge and the confidence to participate. We believe in the power of women to create a more perfect democracy.