

112TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. R. 2212

To secure the Federal voting rights of persons who have been released
from incarceration.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

JUNE 16, 2011

Mr. CONYERS introduced the following bill; which was referred to the
Committee on the Judiciary

A BILL

To secure the Federal voting rights of persons who have
been released from incarceration.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Democracy Restoration
5 Act of 2011”.

6 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

7 The Congress makes the following findings:

8 (1) The right to vote is the most basic constitu-
9 tive act of citizenship. Regaining the right to vote

1 reintegrates offenders into free society, helping to
2 enhance public safety.

3 (2) Article I, section 4 of the Constitution of
4 the United States grants Congress ultimate super-
5 visory power over Federal elections, an authority
6 which has repeatedly been upheld by the Supreme
7 Court.

8 (3) Basic constitutional principles of fairness
9 and equal protection require an equal opportunity
10 for Americans to vote in Federal elections. The right
11 to vote may not be abridged or denied by the United
12 States or by any State on account of race, color,
13 gender or previous condition of servitude. The 14th,
14 15th, 19th, 24th, and 26th Amendments to the Con-
15 stitution empower Congress to enact measures to
16 protect the right to vote in Federal elections.

17 (4) There are three areas where discrepancies
18 in State laws regarding felony convictions lead to
19 unfairness in Federal elections: (A) There is no uni-
20 form standard for voting in Federal elections which
21 leads to an unfair disparity and unequal participa-
22 tion in Federal elections based solely on where a per-
23 son lives; (B) laws governing the restoration of vot-
24 ing rights after a felony conviction vary throughout
25 the country and persons in some States can easily

1 regain their voting rights while in other States per-
2 sons effectively lose their right to vote permanently;
3 and (C) State disenfranchisement laws dispro-
4 tionately impact racial and ethnic minorities.

5 (5) Disenfranchisement results from varying
6 State laws that restrict voting while under some
7 form of criminal justice supervision or after the com-
8 pletion of a felony sentence in some States. Two
9 States do not disenfranchise felons at all (Maine and
10 Vermont). Forty-eight States and the District of Co-
11 lumbia have disenfranchisement laws that deprive
12 convicted offenders of the right to vote while they
13 are in prison. In 35 States, convicted offenders may
14 not vote while they are on parole and 30 of these
15 States disenfranchise felony probationers as well. In
16 10 States, a conviction can result in lifetime dis-
17 enfranchisement.

18 (6) An estimated 5,300,000 Americans, or
19 about 1 in 41 adults, currently cannot vote as a re-
20 sult of a felony conviction. Nearly 4,000,000 (74
21 percent) of the 5,300,000 disqualified voters are not
22 in prison, but are on probation or parole, or are ex-
23 offenders. Approximately 2,000,000 of those individ-
24 uals are individuals who have completed their entire

1 sentence, including probation and parole, yet remain
2 disenfranchised.

3 (7) In those States that disenfranchise ex-of-
4 fenders, the right to vote can be regained in theory,
5 but in practice this possibility is often granted in a
6 nonuniform and potentially discriminatory manner.
7 Offenders must either obtain a pardon or order from
8 the Governor or action by the parole or pardon
9 board, depending on the offense and State. Offend-
10 ers convicted of a Federal offense often have addi-
11 tional barriers to regaining voting rights.

12 (8) State disenfranchisement laws dispropor-
13 tionately impact racial and ethnic minorities. Eight
14 percent of the African-American population, or
15 2,000,000 African-Americans, are disenfranchised.
16 Given current rates of incarceration, approximately
17 one in three of the next generation of African-Amer-
18 ican men will be disenfranchised at some point dur-
19 ing their lifetime. Hispanic citizens are also dis-
20 proportionately disenfranchised based upon their dis-
21 proportionate representation in the criminal justice
22 system.

23 (9) Disenfranchising citizens who have been
24 convicted of a felony offense and who are living and
25 working in the community serves no compelling

1 State interest and hinders their rehabilitation and
2 reintegration into society.

3 (10) State disenfranchisement laws can sup-
4 press electoral participation among eligible voters by
5 discouraging voting among family and community
6 members of disenfranchised persons. Future elec-
7 toral participation by the children of disenfranchised
8 parents may be impacted as well.

9 (11) The United States is the only Western de-
10 mocracy that permits the permanent denial of voting
11 rights to individuals with felony convictions.

12 **SEC. 3. RIGHTS OF CITIZENS.**

13 The right of an individual who is a citizen of the
14 United States to vote in any election for Federal office
15 shall not be denied or abridged because that individual has
16 been convicted of a criminal offense unless such individual
17 is serving a felony sentence in a correctional institution
18 or facility at the time of the election.

19 **SEC. 4. ENFORCEMENT.**

20 (a) ATTORNEY GENERAL.—The Attorney General
21 may, in a civil action, obtain such declaratory or injunctive
22 relief as is necessary to remedy a violation of this Act.

23 (b) PRIVATE RIGHT OF ACTION.—

1 (1) A person who is aggrieved by a violation of
2 this Act may provide written notice of the violation
3 to the chief election official of the State involved.

4 (2) Except as provided in paragraph (3), if the
5 violation is not corrected within 90 days after receipt
6 of a notice under paragraph (1), or within 20 days
7 after receipt of the notice if the violation occurred
8 within 120 days before the date of an election for
9 Federal office, the aggrieved person may, in a civil
10 action, obtain declaratory or injunctive relief with re-
11 spect to the violation.

12 (3) If the violation occurred within 30 days be-
13 fore the date of an election for Federal office, the
14 aggrieved person need not provide notice to the chief
15 election official of the State under paragraph (1) be-
16 fore bringing a civil action to obtain declaratory or
17 injunctive relief with respect to the violation.

18 **SEC. 5. NOTIFICATION OF RESTORATION OF VOTING**

19 **RIGHTS.**

20 (a) STATE NOTIFICATION.—

21 (1) NOTIFICATION.—On the date determined
22 under paragraph (2), each State shall notify in writ-
23 ing any individual who has been convicted of a
24 criminal offense under the law of that State that
25 such individual has the right to vote in an election

1 for Federal office pursuant to the Democracy Res-
2 toration Act and may register to vote in any such
3 election.

4 (2) DATE OF NOTIFICATION.—

5 (A) FELONY CONVICTION.—In the case of
6 such an individual who has been convicted of a
7 felony, the notification required under para-
8 graph (1) shall be given on the date on which
9 the individual—

10 (i) is sentenced to serve only a term
11 of probation; or

12 (ii) is released from the custody of
13 that State (other than to the custody of
14 another State or the Federal Government
15 to serve a term of imprisonment for a fel-
16 ony conviction).

17 (B) MISDEMEANOR CONVICTION.—In the
18 case of such an individual who has been con-
19 victed of a misdemeanor, the notification re-
20 quired under paragraph (1) shall be given on
21 the date on which such individual is sentenced
22 by a State court.

23 (b) FEDERAL NOTIFICATION.—

24 (1) NOTIFICATION.—On the date determined
25 under paragraph (2), the Director of the Bureau of

1 Prisons shall notify in writing any individual who
2 has been convicted of a criminal offense under Fed-
3 eral law that such individual has the right to vote
4 in an election for Federal office pursuant to the De-
5 mocracy Restoration Act and may register to vote in
6 any such election.

7 (2) DATE OF NOTIFICATION.—

8 (A) FELONY CONVICTION.—In the case of
9 such an individual who has been convicted of a
10 felony, the notification required under para-
11 graph (1) shall be given on the date on which
12 the individual—

13 (i) is sentenced to serve only a term
14 of probation by a court established by an
15 Act of Congress; or

16 (ii) is released from the custody of the
17 Bureau of Prisons (other than to the cus-
18 tody of a State to serve a term of impris-
19 onment for a felony conviction).

20 (B) MISDEMEANOR CONVICTION.—In the
21 case of such an individual who has been con-
22 victed of a misdemeanor, the notification re-
23 quired under paragraph (1) shall be given on
24 the date on which such individual is sentenced
25 by a State court.

1 **SEC. 6. DEFINITIONS.**

2 For purposes of this Act:

3 (1) CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTION OR FACIL-
4 ITY.—The term “correctional institution or facility”
5 means any prison, penitentiary, jail, or other institu-
6 tion or facility for the confinement of individuals
7 convicted of criminal offenses, whether publicly or
8 privately operated, except that such term does not
9 include any residential community treatment center
10 (or similar public or private facility).

11 (2) ELECTION.—The term “election” means—

12 (A) a general, special, primary, or runoff
13 election;

14 (B) a convention or caucus of a political
15 party held to nominate a candidate;

16 (C) a primary election held for the selec-
17 tion of delegates to a national nominating con-
18 vention of a political party; or

19 (D) a primary election held for the expres-
20 sion of a preference for the nomination of per-
21 sons for election to the office of President.

22 (3) FEDERAL OFFICE.—The term “Federal of-
23 fice” means the office of President or Vice President
24 of the United States, or of Senator or Representa-
25 tive in, or Delegate or Resident Commissioner to,
26 the Congress of the United States.

1 (4) PROBATION.—The term “probation” means
2 probation, imposed by a Federal, State, or local
3 court, with or without a condition on the individual
4 involved concerning—

5 (A) the individual’s freedom of movement;

6 (B) the payment of damages by the indi-
7 vidual;

8 (C) periodic reporting by the individual to
9 an officer of the court; or

10 (D) supervision of the individual by an of-
11 ficer of the court.

12 **SEC. 7. RELATION TO OTHER LAWS.**

13 (a) STATE LAWS RELATING TO VOTING RIGHTS.—
14 Nothing in this Act shall be construed to prohibit the
15 States from enacting any State law which affords the right
16 to vote in any election for Federal office on terms less
17 restrictive than those established by this Act.

18 (b) CERTAIN FEDERAL ACTS.—The rights and rem-
19 edies established by this Act are in addition to all other
20 rights and remedies provided by law, and neither rights
21 and remedies established by this Act shall supersede, re-
22 strict, or limit the application of the Voting Rights Act
23 of 1965 (42 U.S.C. 1973 et seq.) or the National Voter
24 Registration Act (42 U.S.C. 1973–gg).

1 **SEC. 8. FEDERAL PRISON FUNDS.**

2 No State, unit of local government, or other person
3 may receive or use, to construct or otherwise improve a
4 prison, jail, or other place of incarceration, any Federal
5 grant amounts unless that person has in effect a program
6 under which each individual incarcerated in that person's
7 jurisdiction who is a citizen of the United States is noti-
8 fied, upon release from such incarceration, of that individ-
9 ual's rights under section 3.

10 **SEC. 9. EFFECTIVE DATE.**

11 This Act shall apply to citizens of the United States
12 voting in any election for Federal office held after the date
13 of the enactment of this Act.

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