



STATEMENT TO THE INTERIM JOINT JUDICIARY COMMITTEE MEETING – November 3, 2022

Since 2005, the League of Women Voters of Kentucky has advocated automatic restoration of voting rights to persons who have felony convictions. Over the years a growing number of state legislators from both political parties have supported efforts to pass legislation to put a constitutional amendment on the ballot so Kentuckians could vote to amend our constitution that permanently disenfranchises those convicted of a felony. The time is **now**, in the next legislative session, to finally pass this long-delayed and much-needed legislation.

It's a sad fact that, according to the most recent report from The Sentencing Project, Kentucky bars 152,727 citizens from voting - 4.54% of the total voting eligible population and 11.47% of voting eligible African Americans. This is despite the fact that Governor Beshear's 2019 Executive Order restored voting rights to 178,397 Kentuckians. In addition, 4,041 others have had their sentences expunged since 2016. Had this Executive Order not been issued, Kentucky would now have over 331,000 disenfranchised citizens. The right to vote should not be left up to the Governor to decide. Kentucky voters should decide whether or not to automatically restore voting rights to men and women with past convictions.

The most sacred principle of democracy is that individuals be allowed to impact how they are governed by voting. The right to vote grounds all other rights, empowering citizens to become participants in government rather than mere petitioners. It should not be denied to citizens who are trying to build new, productive lives.

The League of Women Voters of Kentucky and a majority of Kentuckians (67% according to a Mason Dixon poll) believe our constitution needs to be amended to automatically allow those previously convicted of a felony to regain the right to vote upon completion of their sentences. We urge you to enact the necessary legislation in the upcoming 2023 legislative session.

Fran Wagner, President

Empowering Voters. Defending Democracy.