



Disenfranchisement of 3,400 voters
Presented at the Bell Tower Rally in Richmond, Nov 1, 2023
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President

The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan organization founded 103 years ago by the leaders of the women's suffragist movement. We are an issue-focused, activist, and grassroots organization that believes voters must play a critical role in our democracy. Since 1920, the League has worked to deliver on our mission to empower voters and defend democracy.

Virginia is the only state to give sole and unfettered control over how and if people get their voting rights restored to the governor. This system is a tragic holdover from our Jim Crow era laws, and the time is long overdue for this law to be replaced. Starting with Republican Governor Bob McDonnell, this system has at least been improving. Unfortunately, this positive trend was stopped earlier this year when more confusing restrictions were suddenly added to the process without notice or any level of transparency.

Late last Friday the Department of Elections announced that it had restored voting rights to 3,400 people whose rights had been wrongly revoked. Until that announcement, the Department had told the world there were 270, or maybe 10,000, or perhaps as many as 17,000 people. Three thousand people have been restored, but what is the actual number of people wrongly disenfranchised? These are people who have already completed the antiquated and cruelly capricious journey for reinstatement only to once again have their rights removed for the wrong reasons. To add insult, not all of these people were informed of this disenfranchisement, and many showed up to vote just to be humiliated.

We have no idea how many people will be denied their right to vote next week, on Election Day, because of this mass disenfranchisement. Nor do we know how many will stay away out of fear. The League of Women Voters of Virginia supports an immediate outside investigation of what has happened. In addition, we again call upon the General Assembly to pass laws that immediately reinstate a person's voting rights upon release from prison.

It is time to end Jim Crow Era laws and to have a fair process for voting rights reinstatement that does not change on the whim of the occupant of the Governor's mansion.

