The Problem: Voter Disenfranchisement

The United States has the highest incarceration rate in the world with close to 2.2 million people behind bars. Studies have shown that changes in the criminal justice system and in sentencing laws, not changes in crime rates, are responsible for these shocking numbers. One of the hidden costs of the mass incarceration epidemic is the inability of people to exercise their constitutional right to vote.

- The number of people disenfranchised due to a felony conviction has increased dramatically in recent decades as the prison population has increased. There were an estimated 1.17 million people disenfranchised in 1976, 3.34 million in 1996, 5.85 million in 2010, and 6.1 million as of 2016. Without a drastic change in disenfranchisement law, population growth will continue to fuel this trend.

- Approximately 2.5 percent of the total U.S. voting age population—1 out of every 40 adults—is disenfranchised due to a current or previous felony conviction.

- Florida is one of only four states (along with South Dakota, Iowa, and Virginia) with a lifetime ban on voting for any person convicted of a felony. There are 1.5 million Florida residents that are unable to vote- 1 in 10 Floridians of voting age are disenfranchised.

- Nationally, more than 60 percent of those in prison today are people of color. One in 13 African Americans of voting age are disenfranchised, a rate more than four times greater than for non-African Americans.

The Solution: Rights Restoration

Felon disenfranchisement is a relic of the Jim Crow era. It was a policy that was meant to exclude African Americans from participating in civic institutions and the electoral process. Resulting in the rules being written to privilege some in society while stifling the voices of others. The only way for us to have a fair and inclusive democratic process is if we rewrite the very rules that were engineered against these citizens.

- Voting is a civic duty. It brings us together as Americans and helps strengthen our communities. Americans should have a say in their future, their children’s futures, and the future of our great nation.

- When you have served your time, you should earn your rights back. Many taxpaying, law-abiding citizens who have completed their sentences are still unable to vote.

- Everyone deserves a second chance. Restoring a person’s right to vote gives them an opportunity for redemption and a chance to reenter society as civically engaged community members.

- People who have served their time and given an opportunity to participate in the civic process are less likely to commit crimes in the future. A report by the Florida Parole Commission concluded that the three-year recidivism rate for all released inmates was 33.1 percent, while the recidivism rate for released prisoners who had their voting rights restored was only 11 percent.