

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

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Public Facing Advocacy Writing

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COLUMBUS A coalition of voter rights organizations urged elections and law enforcement officials to assist eligible jailed voters cast their ballot in the upcoming March 17, 2020 primary election. In a letter to county boards of elections and sheriffs, advocates remind officials that most voters in jail retain their right to vote and that officials have an obligation to assist eligible voters.

People in jail awaiting trial who are innocent until proven guilty must be able to cast a ballot, as should those serving a misdemeanor sentence. Unfortunately, few jails have widescale outreach programs to ensure voters have access to the ballot, meaning far too many voters are simply disenfranchised, said Mike Brickner, Ohio state director for All Voting is Local.

Democracy works best if everyone who is eligible can participate, and that includes people in the justice system, said Jocelyn Rosnick, policy director, ACLU of Ohio. Encouraging jailed voters to cast a ballot is also vital to their reentry after incarceration, ensuring they continue to participate and engage with civic life.

All Voting is Local and the ACLU of Ohio have sponsored trainings throughout the past year to help local activists enter jails and assist voters with registration and requesting an absentee ballot. Included with the letter is a [fact sheet](#) comparing past programs at the Cuyahoga and Lake County Jails with counties that only provide limited outreach programs.

When advocates are able to interact directly with jailed voters to assist them, participation increases greatly. Our organizations have recruited and trained nonpartisan volunteers across the state who are ready to assist election and jail officials with launching their jail voting program, and ensure that every voice is heard, added Brickner.

Ohio law allows voters who are in jail awaiting trial, and incarcerated for a misdemeanor conviction to vote. People who are on probation, parole or reside in a halfway house may also vote. Only those who are incarcerated after conviction for a felony are disenfranchised, but they may re-register to vote immediately upon release from jail or prison.

Organizations who signed the letter include: ACLU of Ohio, All Voting is Local, Campaign Legal Center, Common Cause Ohio, Dayton Black Young Professionals, League of Women Voters Ohio, Northeast Ohio Voter Advocates, and Office of the Ohio Public Defender.

[Read the letter.](#)

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