

Ex-Offenders have the right to vote in NJ... **so why Vote?**

- ✓ To have a voice in your community
- ✓ To give a voice to the concerns of friends and family in your community who cannot vote because they have been disfranchised
- ✓ To elect representatives who represent you
- ✓ To put your concerns directly to your representative
- ✓ To elect representatives who will:
 - Take action against discriminatory police practices, like racial profiling, that have resulted in predominantly African American and Latino prison populations.
 - Reverse laws that prohibit ex-offenders from getting food stamps, student loans, public housing and public assistance.
 - Pass laws that prohibit discrimination in employment based on unrelated criminal convictions.
 - Address the failures and costs of the War on Drugs and rethink drug policy as an issue of public health, not criminal justice.

The Voting Rights Act of 1965

In 1965, under pressure from civil rights activists, Congress passed The Voting Rights Act allowing Americans of every color the right to vote. Citizens fought hard to get this right to vote...In Mississippi, registration of African Americans rose from 6.7 percent in 1964 to 70.8 percent in 1986. Now in 2004, nearly 5,000 African Americans hold elective office across the South. Let's keep the pressure on.

Laws that need changing

- The present disenfranchisement of citizens in prison, on parole or probation: almost 18 percent of African American men in New Jersey are disenfranchised from voting because they are serving sentences. (Only Maine and Vermont guarantee the right to vote to all citizens, incarcerated or not.)
- Drug Policy Reform needed: the "War on Drugs" targets minorities. New Jersey is #1 among the states in the proportion of new prison admissions who are drug offenders. While African Americans account for 15 percent of the population of New Jersey,

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Laws That Need Changing continued

they account for 81 percent of admissions to prisons for drug offenses. Drug sentencing equity is needed.

- New Jersey's Drug Offender Restraining Order Act of 1999: prohibits anyone convicted or even just charged with a drug law violation from revisiting the area in which the alleged violation is said to have occurred, or any area affected by the violation. This is a denial of due process and further separates ex-offenders from their communities.
- New Jersey's 1000 Foot Rule: individuals convicted of drug crimes that take place within 1000 feet of a school receive harsher treatment and longer sentences. This disproportionately affects poor and minority people who live in cities where schools are closer to residential areas.

Where to get information on candidates and election issues

There are many sources for information about candidates, including organizations that compare the views and platforms of the candidates, and the past voting records of incumbents. You can also contact an elected representative's office directly for information, attend city council, county council or state legislative sessions, follow newspaper coverage of candidates and issues, and search for information on the Internet at your local public library. The following is a short list of some statewide organizations that might have information for you:

League of Women Voters of New Jersey

609-394-3303 • www.lwvnj.org

VoteSmart (toll-free Voter's Research Hotline)

888-VOTE-SMART (888-868-3762) • www.vote-smart.org

American Civil Liberties Union

National Freedom Scorecard

<http://scorecard.aclu.org>

New Jersey Drug Policy Project

www.drugpolicy.org/statebystate/newjersey/

Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN)

973-645-1377 • www.acorn.org



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