

**MOTION BY SUPERVISORS MARK RIDLEY-THOMAS
AND SHEILA KUEHL**

August 13, 2019

Support for the Free the Vote Act (ACA 6)

Exercising the basic rights and responsibilities of citizenship is a core part of life in a democracy. Consequently, it is hard to imagine truly rejoining democratic society, as a parolee, without the fundamental right to vote. Successful reentry depends on how well a parolee is supported and empowered to lead a meaningful life, and the right to vote is an indispensable part of that empowerment. In 2016, the Sentencing Project estimated that six million Americans were unable to vote due to felony disenfranchisement laws. In California, the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation estimated that in 2019, over 50,000 Californians on parole are legally barred from voting in state, federal, or local elections. Many of these citizens are working, paying taxes, and otherwise contributing to society after already having completed a period of disenfranchisement.

Assembly Constitutional Amendment (ACA) 6 (McCarty et. al), the “Free the Vote Act,” provides an opportunity to restore voting rights to justice-involved individuals in California. ACA 6, if placed on the 2020 ballot by the state legislature, will ask California voters to re-enfranchise and restore the right to vote to people on parole. ACA 6 would end felony disenfranchisement inscribed in California’s constitution since 1849. ACA 6 passed the California Assembly Elections and Redistricting Committee on June 19th, 2019, with a 6-1 vote.

Researchers have found that voter engagement contributes to the prevention of crime. A 2011 report by the Florida Parole Commission showed that those leaving incarceration with their voting rights restored had a recidivism rate one-third lower than

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those who did not have their rights restored. Additionally, other research suggests that felony disenfranchisement results in alienation and isolation, which is counterproductive to the goals of rehabilitation (Vogel and Hamilton-Smith, 2012). A survey conducted by Initiate Justice in 2018 found that more than 76% of respondents on parole in California believed that voting would help them feel more connected to their communities and reduce recidivism. Giving justice-involved individuals the right to vote strengthens communities, promotes civic engagement and enhances public safety.

Supporting ACA 6 is consistent with Los Angeles County's (County) efforts to provide voter and civic engagement for justice-involved populations. On February 13, 2018, the Board of Supervisors unanimously voted to instruct relevant County departments to create a plan for voter education and registration of justice-involved individuals. Led by the Director of the Office of Diversion and Reentry and the Registrar Recorder/County Clerk, this led to the creation of the cross-sector LA Free the Vote Taskforce, which registered 562 reentry voters and 1,398 individuals incarcerated in the County jails before the November 2018 election, among other significant accomplishments. Passage of ACA 6 would further advance the County's objective of providing meaningful civic engagement opportunities in order to enhance successful reentry.

California is ready to take this step. The voters have approved several significant ballot propositions, including Propositions 47 and 57, that demonstrated a desire to care for and empower justice-involved individuals, rather than punishing them in ways that undermine rehabilitation and make communities less safe. Yet, California remains behind fourteen other states and Washington, D.C., which either have restored voting rights upon release from prison or have no felony disenfranchisement laws in place. It is time to restore their right to vote, and the County should make its voice heard as the state legislature considers putting ACA 6 before the voters.

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WE THEREFORE MOVE THAT THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS:

Direct the Chief Executive Officer, through the Legislative Affairs and Intergovernmental Relations Branch, to send a five-signature letter to Governor Gavin Newsom and the Los Angeles County State Legislative Delegation, in support of the Assembly Constitutional Amendment 6, the Free the Vote Act, which will give California voters the opportunity to allow the restoration of voting rights to those on parole upon completion of a state or federal prison term.

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