



March 9, 2026

The Honorable David W. Osborne
Speaker
Kentucky House of Representatives
702 Capital Ave, Annex Room 300
Frankfort, KY 40601

The Honorable Robert Stivers
President
Kentucky State Senate
700 Capital Ave.,
Frankfort, KY 40601

RE: The Sentencing Project supports Senate Bill 80 with amendments for a clean bill

Dear Speaker Osborne and President Stivers:

On behalf of The Sentencing Project, I write to express our support for Senate Bill 80 - an act proposing an amendment to Section 145 of the Constitution of Kentucky relating to restoration of rights.

The Sentencing Project supports SB 80 but recommends an amendment that authorizes **all persons** completing their felony sentence inside and outside of prison to have their vote restored.

As Kentucky considers rights restoration for persons completing felony sentences, we encourage you to assess the importance of a true representative democracy, where we all have a fair say in the decisions that shape the communities, regardless of conviction status. Americans have seen how our nation's prison system has been used to silence the voices of millions of Americans at the ballot box. According to The Sentencing Project, more than [158,000 Kentuckians](#) are currently disenfranchised due to criminal convictions. It is time to give these Kentuckians a voice in our democracy given their civic obligation of paying taxes and contributing to community safety.

SB 80 represents a bold step towards a more just and equitable Kentucky, where the right to vote is not a privilege reserved for a select few but a fundamental right guaranteed to all Kentuckians. By lowering the barriers that bar tens of thousands of Kentucky residents from participating in democracy, state officials can move closer to realizing the true essence of American democracy – a system of government that truly represents the will of all its people. [Polling](#) by The Sentencing Project, Stand Up America, Common Cause, and State Innovation Exchange revealed that most Americans believe the right to vote should be an inalienable right for all Americans, extending to those who are currently serving sentences, both within and outside of prison walls.

Ending Felony Disenfranchisement Would Serve Reentry and Public Safety

There is ample reason to believe that expanding the right to vote to incarcerated persons completing their felony sentence would benefit Kentucky. Enfranchising people convicted of crimes is also a vital step toward ensuring the safety of Kentucky's communities. Research shows that "former criminal offenders who enter stable work and family relationships are most likely to desist from crime."¹ This is because once an individual with a criminal record rejoins the community—through gainful employment, payment of taxes, and

¹ Christopher Uggen & Jeff Manza, *Voting and Subsequent Crime and Arrest: Evidence from a Community Sample*, 36 COLUM. HUM. RTS. L. REV. 193, 197 (2004-2005) (citing Robert Sampson & John Laub, *Crime and Deviance over the Life Course: The Salience of Adult Social Bonds*, 55 AM. SOC. REV. 609, 617-618 (1990); Christopher Uggen, *Work as a Turning Point in the Life Course of Criminals: A Duration Model of Age, Employment, and Recidivism*, 65 AM. SOC. REV. 529, 542 (2000)); John Laub et al., *Trajectories of Change in Criminal Offending: Good Marriages and the Desistance Process*, 63 AM. SOC. REV. 225, 237 (1998).

resumption of full family duties—he or she becomes accountable to the other members of that community. Any and all duties that help him or her fully reintegrate will motivate that individual to further engage in community-based activity and away from unlawful conduct. Assuming responsibilities of a “voting member of one’s community would appear to be a logical analog to work and family reintegration.”²

Research supports that [restoring voting rights for people with felony convictions can improve public safety](#).

- A 2004 study controlling for factors like race and gender found that “among former arrestees, about 27% of the non-voters were re-arrested, relative to 12% of the voters.”³ It concluded that “there is at least some correlation between voting and recidivism . . . among people who have had some official contact with the criminal justice system.”⁴
- Another study found that “individuals who are released in states that permanently disenfranchise are roughly nineteen percent *more likely* to be rearrested than those released in states that restore the franchise post-release. This finding provides initial evidence consistent with the thesis that disenfranchisement is directly related to recidivism.”⁵

Plainly, restricting those with felony convictions from voting does nothing to improve the safety of neighborhoods. Restoring the right to vote to those who are currently serving sentences, however, would help educate and prepare these individuals for full re-entry. Registering to vote and casting a ballot would engage their responsibilities as citizens, ultimately resulting in stronger, safer communities in which members do right by one another. In this way, ending felony disenfranchisement promises to help create law-abiding citizens.

As leaders entrusted with shaping Kentucky’s future, you have a rare opportunity to reaffirm your faith in the power of redemption, civic duty, and representative government. Voting is how we teach the values of responsibility, community, and accountability. It’s how we ensure every voice counts—especially those working hardest to rejoin society and give back.

This is not about being soft on crime—it’s about being smart on rehabilitation and ensuring every Kentuckian has a stake in their community’s future. The Sentencing Project urges a favorable report of an amended SB 80 to make it a ‘clean bill’ by removing carve outs and restoring voting rights to all Kentuckians regardless of conviction status.

Sincerely,

Nicole D. Porter

Nicole D. Porter
Senior Director of Advocacy

cc: Members of the Kentucky House of Representatives
Members of the Kentucky State Senate

² Uggem & Manza, *supra* note 15, at 197.

³ *Id.* at 205.

⁴ *Id.* at 206.

⁵ Guy Padraic Hamilton-Smith & Matt Vogel, *The Violence of Voicelessness: The Impact of Felony Disenfranchisement on Recidivism*, 22 BERKELEY LA RAZA L.J. 407, 426 (2015) (emphasis added).