

Commission on Human Rights

Kentucky Human Rights Commission commends Governor Steve Beshear for today restoring voting rights to former felons who have served their sentences and been discharged

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Frankfort, KY, USA, November 24, 2015 – Kentucky Governor Steve Beshear at 10 a.m. (EST) this morning issued Executive Order#2015-871, which automatically restores voting rights to former felons.

The order excludes persons convicted of violent or sex crimes, bribery or treason.

Kentucky Commission on Human Rights Executive Director John J. Johnson said: “We commend Governor Beshear for issuing this monumental executive order. Thousands of people could not participate in the most basic right of Americans, the right to vote. The executive order brings people one step closer to being restored as citizens and being able to positively participate and contribute to society after paying for mistakes they made in life.”

“The right to vote is one of the most intrinsically American privileges, and thousands of Kentuckians are living, working and paying taxes in the state but are denied this basic right,” Gov. Beshear said.

Gov. Beshear said: “Once an individual has served his or her time and paid all restitution, society expects them to reintegrate into their communities and become law-abiding and productive citizens. A key part of that transition is the right to vote.”

Until today, Kentucky was one of only four states to not automatically restore felons’ voting rights upon final discharge of their sentence.

The order said that statistics indicate there are more than 180,000 Kentuckians who were not allowed to vote because they are former felons even though they had completed their sentences and been discharged. The order said that research indicates ex-offenders who vote are less likely to re-offend and return to prison.

“...restoration of the right to vote is an important aspect of reintegrating offenders in society to become law-abiding and productive citizens,” the executive order said.

The Kentucky Commission on Human Rights, several legislators in the state house and senate, the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People), and many others have for years urged the Kentucky Legislature to pass a law that would put to a public vote a state constitutional amendment to automatically restore voting rights to former felons.

The commission was one of hundreds of partners to help organize the 2014 Allied Organizations for Civil Rights. In March 2014, the alliance led thousands to the Kentucky State Capitol steps to urge automatic voter restoration to former felons. Gov. Beshear and several legislators participated in the march and spoke out for the need of automatic voting right restoration.

The Governor’s Office today said:

“Under the terms of the order, for felons who are currently incarcerated or under probation or parole supervision, the Department of Corrections (DOC) will verify prior to issuing a restoration of civil rights that there are no pending criminal cases, charges or arrests, or outstanding court-ordered restitution. Individuals meeting those criteria will be granted automatic restoration and a certificate of Restoration of Civil Rights will be issued.

“Individuals who have already left the correctional system may pick up a restoration of rights form at any Probation and Parole office, or by contacting the Department of Corrections at 502-782-2248 or online at corrections.ky.gov, and return it to the address listed. DOC will verify whether they meet the criteria set out in the executive order. Offenders who do will have their voting rights restored “without undue delay” and receive a certificate of Restoration of Civil Rights in the mail.

“Offenders who don’t meet the criteria for automatic restoration, including those convicted of federal crimes, may still individually apply to have the Governor restore their civil rights under the current restoration process.”

“This approach strikes an effective balance between the need to re-enfranchise thousands of Kentuckians who have paid their debt to society, and the recognition that there are some crimes of such a nature that they require a more deliberative review,” Beshear said.

The Kentucky Commission on Human Rights is the state authority that enforces the laws that prohibit discrimination. For help with discrimination or for more information, contact the commission at 1.800.292.5566.

