

Voting Rights Restoration in Washington State: Examples of Misinformation Provided to Citizens

The present process of voting rights restoration in Washington state is confusing and unduly complicated. People who have served their time in prison still cannot vote unless they have paid off all their financial legal obligations associated with their cases and then have received proper government documentation. Many of the government officials whom citizens consult are understandably confused, and often misinform people who ask about their eligibility. These are examples of misinformation given to individuals the ACLU has assisted in regaining voting rights.

- Scores of individuals who have contacted the ACLU report that they were never told that they would lose their voting rights as the result of a felony conviction.

- Several individuals have been told by county auditors and court clerks that their felony convictions permanently disenfranchised them, that they would never be able to restore their voting rights.

- Several people already had their voting rights restored but were not informed of this. Some went several years without voting, unaware that they were again eligible to vote.

- Several individuals have reported that their probation officers told them, incorrectly, that their voting rights were automatically restored at the time they completed probation.

- One individual was told that that he needed to petition the federal Department of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms to restore his voting rights.

- An eastern Washington man was inaccurately told by a court clerk that he needed to pay a \$200 filing fee and file a new case in order to get back his right to vote.

- When one woman asked a county court clerk about restoring her voting rights, the clerk directed her to purchase a \$20 packet of forms for sealing criminal records and stated that she would need to pay a \$110 filing fee to begin the process.

- Many individuals are never told about their legal financial obligations (LFOs) and, years after their offenses, are surprised that they have significant obligations to fulfill in order to restore their voting rights.

- Many county courts do not regularly send LFO statements to citizens. Receiving no statement, the citizens assume that the LFOs have been fulfilled. Subsequently, many have had their accounts go to a collections agency without any prior notification.

- Court clerk staff have been unable to produce accounting to prove that LFOs have been satisfied, and courts have even insisted that individuals pay to obtain an accounting statement showing that the LFOs have been paid in full.

