

# FACT SHEET

## HJ2/SJ2 Restoration of Voting Rights

**Problem:** When people are convicted for felonies in Virginia, they lose their right to vote while incarcerated. Once they have completed their sentence, the governor has sole authority to restore voting rights.

**Policy solution:** This bill proposes an amendment to the Virginia Constitution to restore a person's voting rights when they leave incarceration. In Virginia, a constitutional amendment needs to be passed by a simple majority in both chambers over two consecutive legislative sessions to be certified for the ballot.

Over the years, several states have made bipartisan efforts to reform their voting laws regarding felony disenfranchisement. Nebraska and Virginia have seen both Republican and Democratic lawmakers collaborate and pass legislation aimed at restoring voting rights to individuals with felony convictions.

### Why is this important?

#### When a debt is paid, it's paid

- Every voice in our democracy deserves to be heard. That includes Virginians who have successfully served their time. They should be able to exercise their right to vote and be fully engaged citizens in their communities.
- The right to vote should be restored when a person returns to their community, to ensure that every voice is heard, and everyone has a chance to participate in our democracy.

- Permanently stripping away a person's right to vote extends a punishment far beyond what is just and reasonable — and prevents people from having a say in the future of their communities.

#### Virginians believe in second chances

- Virginians from all walks of life believe in second chances including law enforcement, faith-based groups, families, businesses, and a large majority of Virginians.
- Restoring the right to vote gives returning citizens a second chance at becoming invested members of their communities
- Restoring the right to vote recognizes our shared human dignity and acknowledges that people's contributions are greater than their mistakes.

#### People who vote are more engaged citizens

- Our democracy works best when it includes all of us.
- Providing returning citizens the chance to fully-engage with society by restoring the right to vote will reduce apathy and encourages people to work together to find solutions.

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