

Felony Disenfranchisement in Connecticut

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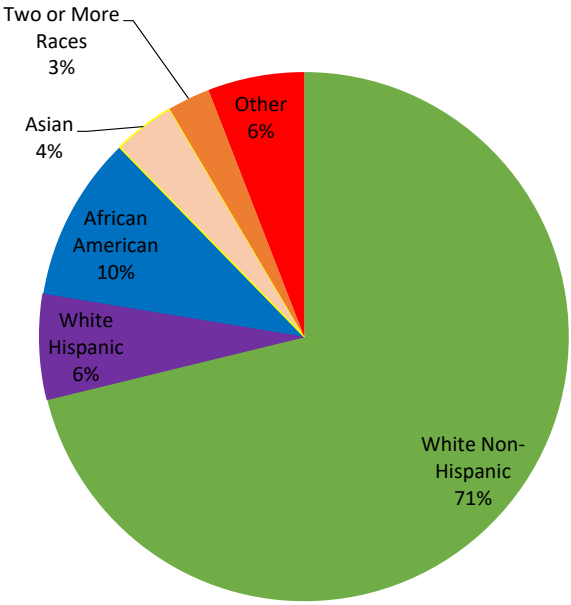
Connecticut Law

- Individuals are disenfranchised while incarcerated for a felony or while on parole following release
- People on probation may vote
- People held in pretrial detention or incarcerated for misdemeanors retain their right to vote

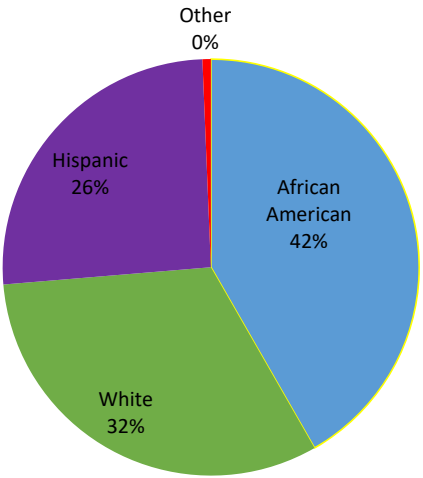
- Around 13,000 people are incarcerated in the state
- Of those incarcerated, approximately 4,300 are serving sentences for misdemeanors or are detained pretrial
- Approximately 3,500 on parole or special parole
- Confusion about voting eligibility for those under supervision in community
- Disproportionate impact on people of color

Disproportionate Impact

CT State Population



Incarcerated Population



Felony Disenfranchisement in New England

- Connecticut's felony disenfranchisement law is the most restrictive in New England.
- Maine and Vermont: all prisoners can vote
- Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and New Hampshire: voting rights are restored automatically when people are released from incarceration

DIFFERENT STATE'S POLICIES: NEW ENGLAND

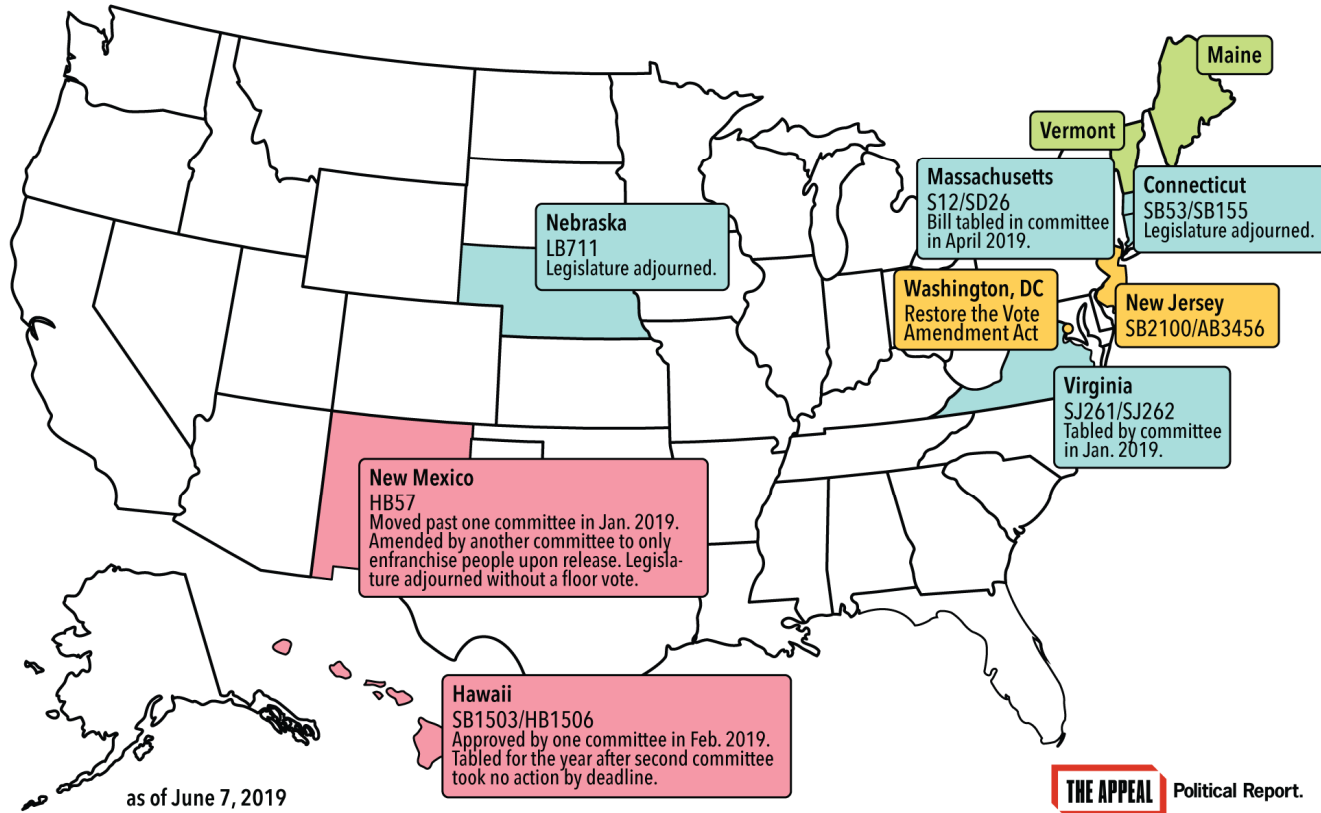
Voting rights restored automatically after release from prison and discharge from parole (people on probation may vote)	Voting rights restored automatically after release from prison	No disenfranchisement for people with criminal convictions
Connecticut	Massachusetts	Maine
	New Hampshire	Vermont
	Rhode Island	

Eliminating Felony Disenfranchisement

- National movement to eliminate felony disenfranchisement entirely.
- In 2019, bills were introduced in multiple states around the country that would permit incarcerated citizens to vote including in Connecticut, Hawaii, Massachusetts, Nebraska, New Mexico, New Jersey, Virginia, and Washington D.C.
- Around the world, many countries do not restrict the voting rights of prisoners (e.g., Canada, South Africa, Ireland, Sweden, Denmark, etc.)

Proposals to abolish felony disenfranchisement

- States with no felony disenfranchisement
- Still-active legislation to abolish felony disenfranchisement
- Legislation to abolish disenfranchisement did not succeed in 2019
- Legislation to abolish disenfranchisement moved one legislative step, but then stalled.



History of Disenfranchisement in Connecticut

- 1818 Constitution: only “white male” citizens over the age of 21 who owned property, paid taxes, or served in the military could vote
- Connecticut denied African Americans the right to vote until 1876, when the state was forced to extend the franchise by the Fifteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution
- Connecticut denied women the franchise until the Nineteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution was ratified in 1920.

History of Disenfranchisement in Connecticut

- 1855: CT Constitution amended to add a literacy requirement
- 1897: CT Constitution amended to require that voters be able to read in the English language
- These literacy and English language requirements remained in place until the 1970s—when Congress's amendment to the federal Voting Rights Act brought an end to these practices

History of Disenfranchisement in Connecticut

- 1818 Constitution: voting rights were “forfeited by a conviction of bribery, forgery, perjury, duelling, fraudulent bankruptcy, theft, or other offence for which an infamous punishment is inflicted”
- 1948: General Assembly given power over voting rights forfeiture
- 1963: Anyone convicted of a felony disenfranchised
- 1973: Restoration upon payment of fines and discharge from confinement, parole or probation
- 2001: Restored voting rights to those on probation; those in CT prisons don't need to pay fines

2019 Bills

- H.B. 7160 (parolee voting rights, eliminating the fine requirement)
- S.B. 25 (parolee voting rights)
- S.B. 53 (prisoner voting rights)
- S.B. 22 (eliminating fine requirement)
- H.B. 5611 (prison gerrymandering)

Why End Felony Disenfranchisement?

- Voting is a core constitutional right that should never be taken away
- The people most impacted by the criminal justice system should be able to participate in the democratic process
- Rehabilitation can be best achieved by treating a person with dignity and fostering connection and engagement with society
- Encouraging access to the political process promotes a sense of fairness and the legitimacy of institutions
- Restoring the right to vote for prisoners recognizes that those in prison are full citizens capable of rejoining society in productive ways