



Legislation Text

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Res. No. 631

Resolution calling upon the New York State Legislature to reintroduce and pass legislation that would require ex-felons to be fully informed of their voting rights.

By Council Members Williams, Cabrera, Dromm, James, Lander, Mendez, Rodriguez, Rose, Palma and Mark-Viverito

Whereas, The right to vote in open and free elections is one of our country's greatest gifts of citizenship, a privilege that is protected in the U.S. Constitution; and

Whereas, In the United States, every state with the exceptions of Maine and Vermont bars incarcerated individuals from voting while in prison; and

Whereas, In New York State, parolees are also banned from voting until they have completed their parole; and

Whereas, There are currently over 122,000 New Yorkers barred from voting because they are either in prison or are on parole; and

Whereas, Although an individual regains the right to vote upon completion of his or her sentence, it is the responsibility of the newly-freed individual to re-register to vote; and

Whereas, Unfortunately, a significant number of incarcerated individuals are misinformed about their voting rights; and

Whereas, According to the Sentencing Project, a criminal justice advocacy group, over 40 percent of prisoners believe that incarceration results in the permanent revocation of voting rights and over 60 percent believe that probation results in the suspension of voting rights; and

Whereas, Such misinformation is particularly alarming in light of the fact that over 80 percent of incarcerated individuals in New York are persons of color; and

Whereas, In order to avoid unnecessary disenfranchisement, it is imperative that individuals who have served out their sentences be informed of their right to vote in New York State; and

Whereas, In the 2009-2010 session of the New York State Legislature, Assemblyman Keith Wright and Senator Velmanette Montgomery introduced A.2266A/S.1266A which, if passed, would have addressed this issue by requiring the Department of Correctional Services or the Division of Parole to inform recently released felons and/or parolees of their reinstated voting rights and to provide them with a form with which to re-register to vote; and

Whereas, A.3375A/S.1264A, also known as the Voting Rights Notification and Registration Act, would have also required those who plead guilty and those who are sentenced to prison to be informed of the fact that they are ineligible to vote for the duration of their term; and

Whereas, To prevent any confusion among election workers and others involved in the elections process about a former felon's eligibility to register and vote, A.3375A/S.1264A would have required the state Board of Elections to inform local Boards of Elections of specific individuals' re-enfranchisement, and to educate all parties involved in the elections process about the voting rights of ex-felons; and

Whereas, A.3375A/S.1264A would have also directed local correctional facilities to notify eligible inmates of their right to vote and to assist them in the registration and absentee voting processes; and

Whereas, Voting in elections is a key ingredient of civil participation, and one that must be encouraged among all eligible New Yorkers; now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Council of the City of New York calls upon the New York State Legislature to reintroduce and pass legislation that would require ex-felons to be fully informed of their voting rights.

