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Kernel Editorial: Give former felons a stake in society by letting them vote

Issue date: 12/7/06 **Section:** [Opinions](#)

Some Kentucky lawmakers and activists are trying to restore voting rights to felons who have done their time.

State House Speaker Jody Richards, D-Bowling Green, said in a news conference last week that he would be sponsoring a constitutional amendment to restore the ability to vote to felons as soon as they complete their sentences, The (Louisville) Courier-Journal reported last week.

If the amendment passes in the upcoming General Assembly session, the amendment could appear on the ballot in 2007. Passing and approving the amendment would be the right choice for Kentucky legislators and voters.

Felonies can range from burglary to murder, and the punishments that are handed down depend on the severity of the offense. That's how criminals should be punished for whatever crimes they have committed. They are sent to prison to be reformed and to learn a lesson.

But what lesson does taking away their right to vote prove?

It shows that the Kentucky system - like those of Virginia and Florida, the only other states to have lifetime voting bans for felons, according to the Courier-Journal article - thinks the released prisoners deserve a second chance for freedom, but not a second chance in making a decision about how their tax money is used.

If felons are reformed enough to be allowed out of prison, they should be able to have a stake in the society they are rejoining. An important and undeniable part of that is to have a say in political decisions.

We hope lawmakers and voters realize that felons have already done their time and deserve the right to vote again.

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