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(Original Signature of Member)

115TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

H. R. _____

To secure the Federal voting rights of persons when released from
incarceration.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Mr. NADLER introduced the following bill; which was referred to the
Committee on _____

A BILL

To secure the Federal voting rights of persons when released
from incarceration.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Democracy Restoration
5 Act of 2018”.

6 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

7 Congress makes the following findings:

8 (1) The right to vote is the most basic constitu-
9 tive act of citizenship. Regaining the right to vote

1 reintegrates individuals with criminal convictions
2 into free society, helping to enhance public safety.

3 (2) Article I, section 4, of the Constitution
4 grants Congress ultimate supervisory power over
5 Federal elections, an authority which has repeatedly
6 been upheld by the United States Supreme Court.

7 (3) Basic constitutional principles of fairness
8 and equal protection require an equal opportunity
9 for citizens of the United States to vote in Federal
10 elections. The right to vote may not be abridged or
11 denied by the United States or by any State on ac-
12 count of race, color, gender, or previous condition of
13 servitude. The 13th, 14th, 15th, 19th, 24th, and
14 26th Amendments to the Constitution empower Con-
15 gress to enact measures to protect the right to vote
16 in Federal elections. The 8th Amendment to the
17 Constitution provides for no excessive bail to be re-
18 quired, nor excessive fines imposed, nor cruel and
19 unusual punishments inflicted.

20 (4) There are 3 areas in which discrepancies in
21 State laws regarding criminal convictions lead to un-
22 fairness in Federal elections—

23 (A) the lack of a uniform standard for vot-
24 ing in Federal elections leads to an unfair dis-

1 parity and unequal participation in Federal
2 elections based solely on where a person lives;

3 (B) laws governing the restoration of vot-
4 ing rights after a criminal conviction vary
5 throughout the country and persons in some
6 States can easily regain their voting rights
7 while in other States persons effectively lose
8 their right to vote permanently; and

9 (C) State disenfranchisement laws dis-
10 proportionately impact racial and ethnic minori-
11 ties.

12 (5) Two States do not disenfranchise individ-
13 uals with criminal convictions at all (Maine and
14 Vermont), but 48 States and the District of Colum-
15 bia have laws that deny convicted individuals the
16 right to vote while they are in prison.

17 (6) In some States disenfranchisement results
18 from varying State laws that restrict voting while in-
19 dividuals are under the supervision of the criminal
20 justice system or after they have completed a crimi-
21 nal sentence. In 32 States, convicted individuals may
22 not vote while they are on parole and 29 of those
23 States disenfranchise individuals on felony probation
24 as well. In 10 States, a conviction can result in life-
25 time disenfranchisement.

1 (7) Several States deny the right to vote to in-
2 dividuals convicted of certain misdemeanors.

3 (8) An estimated 6,100,000 citizens of the
4 United States, or about 1 in 40 adults in the United
5 States, currently cannot vote as a result of a felony
6 conviction. Of the 6,100,000 citizens barred from
7 voting, only 23 percent are in prison. By contrast,
8 77 percent of the disenfranchised reside in their
9 communities while on probation or parole or after
10 having completed their sentences. Approximately
11 3,100,000 citizens who have completed their sen-
12 tences remain disenfranchised due to restrictive
13 State laws. In 6 States—Alabama, Florida, Ken-
14 tucky, Mississippi, Tennessee, and Virginia—more
15 than 7 percent of the total population is
16 disenfranchised.

17 (9) In those States that disenfranchise individ-
18 uals post-sentence, the right to vote can be regained
19 in theory, but in practice this possibility is often
20 granted in a non-uniform and potentially discrimina-
21 tory manner. Disenfranchised individuals must ei-
22 ther obtain a pardon or an order from the Governor
23 or an action by the parole or pardon board, depend-
24 ing on the offense and State. Individuals convicted

1 of a Federal offense often have additional barriers to
2 regaining voting rights.

3 (10) State disenfranchisement laws dispropor-
4 tionately impact racial and ethnic minorities. More
5 than 7 percent of the African-American population,
6 or 2,200,000 African-Americans, are
7 disenfranchised. Currently, 1 of every 13 African-
8 Americans are rendered unable to vote because of
9 felony disenfranchisement, which is a rate more than
10 4 times greater than non African-Americans. Over 7
11 percent of African-American adults are
12 disenfranchised whereas only 1.8 percent of non Af-
13 rican-Americans are. In 4 States (Kentucky, 26 per-
14 cent; Virginia, 22 percent; Florida, 21 percent; and
15 Tennessee, 21 percent), more than 1 in 5 African-
16 Americans are unable to vote because of prior con-
17 victions.

18 (11) Latino citizens are disproportionately
19 disenfranchised based upon their disproportionate
20 representation in the criminal justice system. If cur-
21 rent incarceration trends hold, 17 percent of Latino
22 men will be incarcerated during their lifetimes, in
23 contrast to less than 6 percent of non-Latino White
24 men. When analyzing the data across 10 States,
25 Latinos generally have disproportionately higher

1 rates of disenfranchisement compared to their pres-
2 ence in the voting age population. In 6 out of 10
3 States studied in 2003, Latinos constitute more
4 than 10 percent of the total number of persons
5 disenfranchised by State felony laws. In 4 States
6 (California, 37 percent; New York, 34 percent;
7 Texas, 30 percent; and Arizona, 27 percent),
8 Latinos were disenfranchised by a rate of more than
9 25 percent.

10 (12) Disenfranchising citizens who have been
11 convicted of a criminal offense and who are living
12 and working in the community serves no compelling
13 State interest and hinders their rehabilitation and
14 reintegration into society.

15 (13) State disenfranchisement laws can sup-
16 press electoral participation among eligible voters by
17 discouraging voting among family and community
18 members of disenfranchised persons. Future elec-
19 toral participation by the children of disenfranchised
20 parents may be impacted as well.

21 (14) The United States is the only Western de-
22 mocracy that permits the permanent denial of voting
23 rights for individuals with felony convictions.

1 **SEC. 3. RIGHTS OF CITIZENS.**

2 The right of an individual who is a citizen of the
3 United States to vote in any election for Federal office
4 shall not be denied or abridged because that individual has
5 been convicted of a criminal offense unless such individual
6 is serving a felony sentence in a correctional institution
7 or facility at the time of the election.

8 **SEC. 4. ENFORCEMENT.**

9 (a) ATTORNEY GENERAL.—The Attorney General
10 may, in a civil action, obtain such declaratory or injunctive
11 relief as is necessary to remedy a violation of this Act.

12 (b) PRIVATE RIGHT OF ACTION.—

13 (1) IN GENERAL.—A person who is aggrieved
14 by a violation of this Act may provide written notice
15 of the violation to the chief election official of the
16 State involved.

17 (2) RELIEF.—Except as provided in paragraph
18 (3), if the violation is not corrected within 90 days
19 after receipt of a notice under paragraph (1), or
20 within 20 days after receipt of the notice if the viola-
21 tion occurred within 120 days before the date of an
22 election for Federal office, the aggrieved person
23 may, in a civil action, obtain declaratory or injunc-
24 tive relief with respect to the violation.

25 (3) EXCEPTION.—If the violation occurred
26 within 30 days before the date of an election for

1 Federal office, the aggrieved person need not provide
2 notice to the chief election official of the State under
3 paragraph (1) before bringing a civil action to obtain
4 declaratory or injunctive relief with respect to the
5 violation.

6 **SEC. 5. NOTIFICATION OF RESTORATION OF VOTING**
7 **RIGHTS.**

8 (a) STATE NOTIFICATION.—

9 (1) NOTIFICATION.—On the date determined
10 under paragraph (2), each State shall notify in writ-
11 ing any individual who has been convicted of a
12 criminal offense under the law of that State that
13 such individual has the right to vote in an election
14 for Federal office pursuant to the Democracy Res-
15 toration Act of 2018 and may register to vote in any
16 such election.

17 (2) DATE OF NOTIFICATION.—

18 (A) FELONY CONVICTION.—In the case of
19 such an individual who has been convicted of a
20 felony, the notification required under para-
21 graph (1) shall be given on the date on which
22 the individual—

23 (i) is sentenced to serve only a term
24 of probation; or

1 (ii) is released from the custody of
2 that State (other than to the custody of
3 another State or the Federal Government
4 to serve a term of imprisonment for a fel-
5 ony conviction).

6 (B) MISDEMEANOR CONVICTION.—In the
7 case of such an individual who has been con-
8 victed of a misdemeanor, the notification re-
9 quired under paragraph (1) shall be given on
10 the date on which such individual is sentenced
11 by a State court.

12 (b) FEDERAL NOTIFICATION.—

13 (1) NOTIFICATION.—Any individual who has
14 been convicted of a criminal offense under Federal
15 law shall be notified in accordance with paragraph
16 (2) that such individual has the right to vote in an
17 election for Federal office pursuant to the Democ-
18 racy Restoration Act of 2018 and may register to
19 vote in any such election.

20 (2) DATE OF NOTIFICATION.—

21 (A) FELONY CONVICTION.—In the case of
22 such an individual who has been convicted of a
23 felony, the notification required under para-
24 graph (1) shall be given—

1 (i) in the case of an individual who is
2 sentenced to serve only a term of proba-
3 tion, by the Assistant Director for the Of-
4 fice of Probation and Pretrial Services of
5 the Administrative Office of the United
6 States Courts on the date on which the in-
7 dividual is sentenced; or

8 (ii) in the case of any individual com-
9 mitted to the custody of the Bureau of
10 Prisons, by the Director of the Bureau of
11 Prisons, during the period beginning on
12 the date that is 6 months before such indi-
13 vidual is released and ending on the date
14 such individual is released from the cus-
15 tody of the Bureau of Prisons.

16 (B) MISDEMEANOR CONVICTION.—In the
17 case of such an individual who has been con-
18 victed of a misdemeanor, the notification re-
19 quired under paragraph (1) shall be given on
20 the date on which such individual is sentenced
21 by a court established by an Act of Congress.

22 **SEC. 6. DEFINITIONS.**

23 For purposes of this Act:

24 (1) CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTION OR FACIL-
25 ITY.—The term “correctional institution or facility”

1 means any prison, penitentiary, jail, or other institu-
2 tion or facility for the confinement of individuals
3 convicted of criminal offenses, whether publicly or
4 privately operated, except that such term does not
5 include any residential community treatment center
6 (or similar public or private facility).

7 (2) ELECTION.—The term “election” means—

8 (A) a general, special, primary, or runoff
9 election;

10 (B) a convention or caucus of a political
11 party held to nominate a candidate;

12 (C) a primary election held for the selec-
13 tion of delegates to a national nominating con-
14 vention of a political party; or

15 (D) a primary election held for the expres-
16 sion of a preference for the nomination of per-
17 sons for election to the office of President.

18 (3) FEDERAL OFFICE.—The term “Federal of-
19 fice” means the office of President or Vice President
20 of the United States, or of Senator or Representa-
21 tive in, or Delegate or Resident Commissioner to,
22 the Congress of the United States.

23 (4) PROBATION.—The term “probation” means
24 probation, imposed by a Federal, State, or local

1 court, with or without a condition on the individual
2 involved concerning—

3 (A) the individual's freedom of movement;

4 (B) the payment of damages by the indi-
5 vidual;

6 (C) periodic reporting by the individual to
7 an officer of the court; or

8 (D) supervision of the individual by an of-
9 ficer of the court.

10 **SEC. 7. RELATION TO OTHER LAWS.**

11 (a) STATE LAWS RELATING TO VOTING RIGHTS.—
12 Nothing in this Act shall be construed to prohibit the
13 States from enacting any State law which affords the right
14 to vote in any election for Federal office on terms less
15 restrictive than those established by this Act.

16 (b) CERTAIN FEDERAL ACTS.—The rights and rem-
17 edies established by this Act are in addition to all other
18 rights and remedies provided by law, and neither rights
19 and remedies established by this Act shall supersede, re-
20 strict, or limit the application of the Voting Rights Act
21 of 1965 (52 U.S.C. 10301 et seq.) or the National Voter
22 Registration Act of 1993 (52 U.S.C. 20501 et seq.).

23 **SEC. 8. FEDERAL PRISON FUNDS.**

24 No State, unit of local government, or other person
25 may receive or use, to construct or otherwise improve a

1 prison, jail, or other place of incarceration, any Federal
2 funds unless that person has in effect a program under
3 which each individual incarcerated in that person's juris-
4 diction who is a citizen of the United States is notified,
5 upon release from such incarceration, of that individual's
6 rights under section 3.

7 **SEC. 9. EFFECTIVE DATE.**

8 This Act shall apply to citizens of the United States
9 voting in any election for Federal office held after the date
10 of the enactment of this Act.

Member's signature: _____

Member's name (printed): _____

Jerrold Nadler

CONSTITUTIONAL AUTHORITY STATEMENT

To accompany: *The Democracy Restoration Act of 2018.*

Pursuant to clause 7 of Rule XII of the Rules of the House of Representatives, the following statement is submitted regarding the specific powers granted to Congress in the Constitution to enact the accompanying bill or joint resolution.

Congress has the power to enact this legislation pursuant to the following:

- 1) Article I, Section 4, Clause 1 of the United States Constitution. This provision permits Congress to make or alter the regulations pertaining to Federal elections;
- 2) Section 5 of the Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution. This provision grants Congress the authority to enact appropriate laws protecting the civil rights of all Americans; and
- 3) The Eighth Amendment to the United States Constitution. This provision prohibits excessive bail, excessive fines and cruel and unusual punishment.

Statement of the Hon. Jerrold Nadler
Introduction of the Democracy Restoration Act of 2018
July 26, 2018

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to introduce the Democracy Restoration Act of 2018. This legislation will serve to clarify and, in some cases, expand the voting rights of people with felony convictions, the next logical step in restoring their full participation in civic life.

The United States remains one of the world's strictest nations when it comes to denying the right to vote to citizens convicted of crimes. An estimated 6.1 million citizens are ineligible to vote in federal elections due to their status as ex-offenders. More than four and a half million of these disqualified voters are not in prison, but are on probation, parole, or have completed their sentence. Due to differences in state laws and rates of criminal punishment, states vary widely in the practice of disenfranchisement, demonstrating a critical federal interest for uniform standards.

Clarification of the law on restoration of ex-offender voting rights is a critical next step in criminal justice reform. In 2007, President George W. Bush signed the Second Chance Act into law, signaling a bipartisan awareness of the importance of enacting policies that assist in the reintegration of ex-offenders into their communities. Recent public opinion research has also shown that a significant majority of Americans favor voting rights for people on probation or parole, who are currently supervised in their communities, as well as for individuals who have completed their sentences. This legislation both captures the bipartisan spirit of the Bush administration and is consistent with evolving public opinion on rehabilitation of ex-offenders.

From a Constitutional basis, the Democracy Restoration Act is a narrowly crafted effort to expand voting rights for people with felony convictions, while protecting state prerogatives to generally establish voting qualifications. The legislation would only apply to persons who are not in prison, and would only apply to federal elections. As such, our bill is fully consistent with constitutional requirements established by the Supreme Court in a series of decisions upholding federal voting rights laws.

Since the initial introduction of this legislation, the Sentencing Project reports 27 states have amended felony disenfranchisement policies in an effort to reduce their restrictiveness and expand voter eligibility. These reforms have resulted in an estimated more than 800,000 citizens regaining their voting rights. Yet, despite these reforms, the overall rate of ex-offender disenfranchisement has not abated and continues to have a disproportionate impact on communities of color. Many of the state reforms still rely on lengthy waiting periods or clemency and several feature burdensome procedural hurdles that have proven difficult to navigate for persons seeking to restore their voting rights. As a result, approximately 50 percent of the entire disenfranchised population is clustered in 12 states, with Florida alone accounting for 48 percent of the post-sentence population.

Proponents of ex-offender disenfranchisement have offered few justifications for continuing the practice. In fact, the strongest empirical research suggests that prohibitions on the right to vote undermine both our voting system and the fundamental rights of people with felony

convictions. A series of studies make clear that civic engagement is pivotal in the transition from incarceration and discouraging repeat offenses. Disenfranchisement laws only serve to isolate and alienate ex-offenders, creating additional obstacles in their attempt to successfully put the past behind them by fully reintegrating into society. But that is only half the story.

The current patchwork of state laws has created widespread confusion among election officials throughout the country and served as the justification for flawed voter purges. For example, although people with misdemeanor convictions never lose the right to vote in Ohio, in 2008, 30 percent of election officials in the state responded incorrectly or expressed uncertainty about whether individuals with misdemeanor convictions could vote. A similar survey by the Nebraska ACLU in advance of the 2016 general election determined that about half of state election officials gave out the wrong information about former felons voting rights. Given the general confusion by election officials on restoration of voting rights, many ex-offenders are hesitant to even attempt registration, depriving eligible voters of their rights. Only federal law can conclusively resolve the ambiguities in this area plaguing our voting system.

In past Congresses, voting restoration legislation has been supported by a broad coalition of groups interested in voting and civil rights, including the NAACP, ACLU, Human Rights Watch, the Brennan Center for Justice, and the Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights, among many others. This coalition has expanded to include many law enforcement groups including the American Probation and Parole Association, the Association of Paroling Authorities International, and the National Black Police Association, among others, who recognize that allowing people to vote after release from prison helps rebuild ties to the community that motivate law-abiding behavior.

The denial of voting rights by many states to ex-offenders represents a vestige from a time when suffrage was denied to whole classes of our population based on race, gender, religion, national origin and property. We believe that our nation fails not only people with felony convictions by denying them the right to vote, but the rest of our society that has struggled throughout its history to ensure that its citizenry be part of legitimate and inclusive elections. It is long overdue that these restrictions be relegated to unenlightened history.

115th Cosponsors: Democracy Restoration Act of 2018

Rep. Jackson Lee
Rep. Cohen
Rep. Johnson of GA
Rep. Raskin
Rep. Cicilline
Rep. Boyle
Rep. Kaptur
Rep. Schakowsky
Rep. Jeffries
Rep. Norton
Rep. Scott
Rep. Cummings
Rep. Lieu
Rep. Moore
Rep. McGovern
Rep. Blumenauer
Rep. Pascrell
Rep. Larsen
Rep. Lofgren
Rep. Ryan of OH

List in formation....