



North Carolina Council of Churches

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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N.C. Council of Churches Urges Elected Leaders and State Board of Elections to Restore and Protect Voting Rights

We write as the Executive Committee of the Governing Board of the North Carolina Council of Churches, which comprises 18 denominations across N.C. Please know that you are regularly in our prayers, as are all elected officials with the responsibility of making our municipalities, state, and nation a place of “liberty and justice for all.”

On behalf of our 6,200 member congregations, the North Carolina Council of Churches strongly supports the efforts of [the Unlock Our Vote campaign](#) to restore voting rights to everyone who lives in our communities. Our decision to support re-enfranchising everyone who lives in our communities is rooted in our long-standing commitment to [dismantle white supremacy](#) and [protect the right to vote](#).

As people of God, we believe that everyone -- Black, brown, and white -- has the right to cast a ballot. “One person, one vote” is not only the bedrock of democracy, it is a cornerstone of a moral society. As faith leaders who share the Christian faith with you, we ground this belief in the firm foundation that each one of us is created in the Image of God. We believe if each one is so valuable in the eyes of God, it only stands to reason that each person’s vote is valuable and should count.

Yet, nearly 60,000 North Carolinians do not have the right to vote because an outdated law denies them their full citizenship. The law has its roots in the post-Reconstruction 1875 Amendments to the N.C. Constitution, which also required segregation in schools and banned interracial marriage.¹ These returning citizens have completed their sentences, but are not treated equally under the law. Many of them would be able to vote if not for an inability to pay outstanding fines and fees. This is nothing short of a modern-day poll tax, creating a “pay-to-vote” system that corrupts the integrity of our electoral system.

Besides the value of each person’s vote as an individual created in the Image of God, this punitive system runs afoul of basic Christian teachings on reconciliation and restoration. Our

¹ Motion for Summary Judgement, Community Success Initiative et al vs Timothy K Moore et al, Page 6, <https://forwardjustice.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/CSI-v.-Moore-MSJ-Brief-1.pdf>

God is one of grace whose desire is for each of us to be restored fully to community, especially when restitution measures have been met (sentence served, etc.).

We believe it is time for North Carolina to join the 19 other states that restore voting rights to returning citizens when their prison sentences have been served. Forcing someone to wait until probation or parole have also ended is not only unfair for those who are denied the right to vote, it also harms our families, our neighborhoods, and our congregations.

With the November elections fast approaching, time is running out to right this wrong. In the fall of 2019, a lawsuit was filed to change this discriminatory law by challenging it on constitutional grounds. Yet rather than agree to a free and fair election, Tim Moore and Phil Berger, the legislative defendants in the case, claimed that felon disenfranchisement is necessary because it incentivizes completion of post-release probation. The data from states across the country does not support this claim.²

For much of its history, North Carolina has used all manner of mechanisms to deprive citizens of their right to vote. Almost without fail, these measures disproportionately impact people of color and poor people. Just as faith communities have long served as a rallying place to work for racial equity -- from the abolitionist movement to the civil rights movement to today's Movement for Black Lives -- we are answering the call once again to use our voices to call for the restoration of voting rights for all returning citizens.

Furthermore, we will be asking our denominational leadership and member congregations to educate their congregations on how returning citizens who *can* vote will exercise their right to do so. We will offer study materials for small groups and sermon suggestions for worship, grounded in the voice of the Old Testament prophets and New Testament gospels.

Thank you for helping us.

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Founded in 1935, the North Carolina Council of Churches enables denominations, congregations, and people of faith to impact our state on issues such as racial equity, farmworker rights, environment, LGBTQ+ rights, economic justice and development, human well-being, equality, compassion and peace, following the example and mission of Jesus Christ. The Council comprises 26 distinct judicatories from 18 denominations. Across the state, our members have over 6,200 congregations with about 1.5 million congregants. For more information about the Council's 85-year history, visit www.ncchurches.org. To stay up to date on progressive, faith-based news, follow us on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

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² Brief of the District of Columbia, California, Hawaii, Massachusetts, and Nevada as Amici Curiae in Support of Plaintiffs, Pages 18-19, <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/6939926-CSI-v-Moore-Amicus-Brief-DC-CA-HI-MA-NV.html>