

2005-06 SESSION

COMMITTEE HEARING RECORDS

Assembly Committee on Campaigns & Elections (AC-CE)

Sample:

Record of Comm. Proceedings ... RCP

- 05hrAC-EdR_RCP_pt01a
- 05hrAC-EdR_RCP_pt01b
- 05hrAC-EdR_RCP_pt02

➤ Appointments ... Appt

➤ **

➤ Clearinghouse Rules ... CRule

➤ **

➤ Committee Hearings ... CH

➤ **

➤ Committee Reports ... CR

➤ **

➤ Executive Sessions ... ES

➤ **

➤ Hearing Records ... HR

➤ **

➤ Miscellaneous ... Misc

➤ **05hr_AC-CE_Misc_pt12**

➤ Record of Comm. Proceedings ... RCP

➤ **

January 25, 2006

Rep. Stephen Freese, Chairperson
Assembly Committee on Campaigns and Elections
Wisconsin Legislature,
State Capitol, Madison, WI

RE: Comments on Assembly Bill 865

Representative Freese:

My name is Bill Adamski and I am speaking as a representative of Fair Elections Wisconsin, which is a citizens' group dedicated to helping ensure that elections in the State are conducted in a fully transparent, democratic manner that encourages all eligible voters to exercise their most important civic right.

Fair Elections Wisconsin strongly endorses AB 865, which – if enacted – would accelerate the restoration of voting privileges to convicted felons in Wisconsin -- immediately upon their release from prison.

Felons no longer serving in prison have paid their debt to society for committing serious offenses. The difficult process of rehabilitating and re-integrating these people back into society as responsible citizens can be made more effective if, immediately upon release from prison, they are eligible to have a role in the civic process, including voting.

In a Harris poll conducted during 2002 fully 80% of those surveyed supported restoring voting rights to felons who have completed their prison sentences^(a). These Americans see felony re-enfranchisement as an issue of rehabilitation, healing and the promotion of democracy.

There are currently 14 states that allow felons to vote immediately upon their release from prison^(b). These states include our neighbors Illinois and Michigan. Other states (e.g., Iowa, Connecticut, Alabama, Nevada) have taken or are currently taking steps towards accelerating the re-enfranchisement of felons who have completed their prison terms^(b). Wisconsin should join this growing list of states that see immediate re-enfranchisement as a major step in this rehabilitation process.

Allowing felons to vote when released from prison but still on probation or parole would also have a major side benefit of simplifying poll workers' duties on election day. Namely, poll workers would not be required to track and prohibit those felons who currently cannot vote under the above-described conditions. The issue of ineligible felons voting during recent elections has fueled unnecessary accusations of alleged voter fraud. As it turns out, almost ineligible felons who did vote sincerely thought that they could do so.

Fair Elections Wis wants AB 865 enacted in order to make that currently-erroneous supposition a reality.

In addition to the Assembly passing AB 865, it is obvious that the same bill needs to be introduced and passed in the Senate. Governor Doyle should then sign this passed legislation into law soon thereafter so that affected individuals can be eligible to vote in the November 2006 elections.

Sincerely,



Bill Adamski

(for Fair Elections Wisconsin)

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(a) Source: The New York Times, Jan 10, 2006.

(b) Source: Sentencing Project web site (www.sentencingproject.org)



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January 25, 2006

To: Assembly Committee on Campaigns and Elections
Re: Assembly Bill 865

The League of Women Voters of Wisconsin supports AB 865 which would restore the right to vote to non-incarcerated felons residing in the community on probation or parole.

The League historically has held that the right to vote and the expansion of the electorate should be supported, encouraged and defended. Women were denied the right to vote until a mere 85 years ago in the United States. Black citizens were blocked from voting in parts of the country until recent times. Thankfully such injustices have been corrected.

The League believes offenders are unduly criminalized by not having the right to vote. Felons who have served their sentences are released to the community and given the responsibility of reintegrating into society. They are allowed and expected to engage in most aspects of community life, including productive employment. Voting is part of responsible citizenship. It is an act that engages citizens in their community and their government and provides them with representation. Restoring a released felon's right to vote is not a threat to the safety of the community but rather a positive involvement that should be encouraged.

From a practical standpoint, allowing non-incarcerated felons the right to vote would end allegation of fraudulent voting by felons. If they live in the community, they are eligible to vote.

It is time our state thought more in terms of rehabilitation rather than emphasizing punishment of offenders.

Thank you for listening. We hope AB 865 will garner bipartisan support.

January 25, 2006

To: The Assembly Committee on Campaigns and Elections

There are 3 reasons to support AB 865.

1. **Easier election administration.** Pollworkers would not have to compare registrants and voters with a list of felons on probation. Those who now have to produce and update such a list would save money and time. Election law is complex, and election administration is a myriad of details. We are not putting enough resources into running our elections. I hope this changes, but another way to improve this situation is to make it simpler.
2. **Save government dollars.** Today we are spending precious government resources of the FBI, district attorney, and court time on prosecuting the "crime" of voting. In a time when law enforcement budgets are very tight, let these people concentrate on more important crimes.
3. **It is in our interest to rehabilitate felons.** Let's end the idea of punishing people who are out of jail by not letting them vote. Instead, let's welcome them into full citizenship, rehabilitate them, and turn them into productive citizens and taxpayers. Let's engage them in the democratic process. Society needs them to become productive and stay away from further incidents that would send them back. As taxpayers, our goal should be full rehabilitation so we can reduce our huge prison expenditures.

On September 28, 2005, Kevin Kennedy, the Executive Director of the State Elections Board, in a written recommendation to the State elections Board, wrote: "We are needlessly complicating the administration of elections by criminalizing behavior that is at the heart of representative government. There have been an inordinate number of legislative and administrative proposals put forward to identify and prevent convicted felons who are actively participating in society under the supervision of the Department of Corrections from participating in the electoral process. Our administrative resources could be much better focused without this diversion."

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