

**August 3, 2020**

**ATTORNEY GENERAL RAOUL LEADS COALITION OPPOSING FLORIDA'S PAY-TO-VOTE SYSTEM FOR INDIVIDUALS FORMERLY INCARCERATED**

***Raoul, 19 Attorneys General Argue Florida Conditions on Restoring Voting Rights Disproportionally Harm Black and Latino Communities***

**Chicago** — Attorney General Kwame Raoul, with Washington D.C. Attorney General Karl A. Racine, today led a coalition of 20 attorneys general in opposing Florida's "pay-to-vote" law that creates barriers to voting for formerly-incarcerated individuals. Florida's Senate Bill 7066 (SB-7066) requires people to pay all legal financial obligations before they can vote, which disenfranchises citizens long after their release from incarceration.

[In an amicus brief](#) filed in *Jones v. DeSantis*, Raoul and the coalition argue that SB-7066 unlawfully conditions voting on legal financial obligations and does not provide an adequate process for determining the amount owed. Raoul and the coalition note the law disproportionately harms Black and Latino communities and low-income residents.

"Voting is a right. It is not a privilege only for those who can afford to pay a poll tax," Raoul said. "Pay-to-vote laws are discriminatory and serve mainly to suppress Black and other minority voters. Individuals who have completed their sentences deserve a second chance, which includes having the right to participate in our nation's democracy. I will continue to fight discrimination in any form, which includes ensuring that people who have completed their sentences regain their fundamental voting rights."

Felon disenfranchisement in the United States is a remnant of Jim Crow-era voter suppression. Studies show allowing former felons to vote benefits both the returning individuals and the communities they rejoin. However, as of 2016, approximately 4.7 million former felons in the United States – about one in every 40 adults – have completed the terms of their incarceration but are denied voting rights.

In 2018, Florida voters approved Amendment 4, a constitutional amendment that automatically restored the voting rights of some felons "upon completion of all terms" of their sentences, "including parole or probation." In response, in 2019, the Florida Legislature enacted SB-7066, which defined "completion of all terms of sentence" to include legal financial obligations included in the sentence. Following a legal challenge to SB-7066, the district court blocked enforcement of many parts of the law, and the case is now on appeal to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 11th Circuit. If the court upholds SB-7066, nearly 1 million Florida residents would be unable to vote because they have unpaid legal financial obligations.

In this amicus brief, Raoul and the coalition support the plaintiffs' challenge to the Florida felon disenfranchisement law because:

- **Pay-to-vote laws harm low-income returning citizens and do not facilitate payment.** States that condition a former felon's restoration of voting rights on payment of all legal financial obligations disadvantage low-income residents by indefinitely depriving them of the right to vote. There is little evidence that disenfranchisement compels former felons to pay outstanding legal financial obligations if they do not have the money to do so. This is especially true in Florida, which has not established an administrative process for returning individuals to ascertain what, if anything, they owe.

- **Felon disenfranchisement disproportionately harms Black and Latino communities.** States have recognized the importance of restoring voting rights to returning residents given the disparate impact of felon disenfranchisement laws on minority communities. As of 2016, more than 7.4 percent of the voting-age population among Black Americans could not vote, as compared with only 1.8 percent of the non-Black population. In Florida, more than 20 percent of Black adults have been disenfranchised. Disenfranchisement laws also disproportionately harm Latino communities because they are incarcerated at higher rates than the non-Latinos: about 2.4 times greater for Latino men and 1.5 times for Latina women.
- **Expanding voting to former felons promotes successful reintegration and enhances public safety.** Over the past 20 years, states have restored the right to vote to more than 1 million people by reforming felon disenfranchisement laws. These reforms include laws repealing lifetime disenfranchisement, allowing felons to vote while completing the terms of their probation or parole, eliminating requirements to pay legal financial obligations, and providing information to felons leaving correctional facilities about restoration of their voting rights and registering to vote. These efforts are supported by studies finding that restoring voting rights to former felons fosters civic participation, enhances public safety and reduces their likelihood of committing further crimes.

Joining Attorneys General Raoul and Racine in filing the brief are the attorneys general of California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Vermont, Virginia and Washington.