

Governor Tony Evers
P.O. Box 7863
Madison, WI 53707

July 24, 2025

VIA EMAIL

Re: VETO Senate Bill 95 / Assembly Bill 87

Dear Governor Evers,

We, the undersigned organizations, write this letter to express our great concern about legislation that recently passed through the legislature – Senate Bill 95 / Assembly Bill 87 and to ask that you exercise your authority to veto this legislation. The bill would prevent Wisconsinites with felony convictions in their past from restoring their right to vote if they have not yet paid legal financial obligations. To put it simply: this is a modern-day poll tax that will prevent people who cannot pay from participating in elections.

The undersigned organizations are nonpartisan nonprofits that work toward improving the democratic process and protecting voting rights for every Wisconsinite.

Democracy works best when all people can actively participate. Yet, Wisconsin is already behind the times when it comes to voting rights restoration after a felony, disenfranchising nearly 70,000 of its residents, including those incarcerated and living in the community on parole or probation.¹ Wisconsin law currently restores the right to vote upon completion of community supervision, including probation or parole. Nine other states have similar laws, while twenty-three automatically restore rights upon release from prison and two states never disenfranchise at all. SB 95/ AB 87's modern-day poll tax would not only move Wisconsin further from an inclusive democracy, but it would put it at the bottom of the barrel nationally (only a handful of states make payment of legal debts a barrier to voting) and make it an extreme outlier in the Midwest where almost all other states restore voting rights after prison and no other state requires payment of legal financial obligations.

Additionally, Wisconsin's disenfranchisement scheme dramatically and disproportionately takes away the right to vote from Wisconsin's Black voters, Native voters, and other communities of color. Although Black Wisconsinites make up only about 6.1% of the state's voting-age population, they represent 32% of those who are disenfranchised by incarceration or community

¹ [Locked Out 2024: Four Million Denied Voting Rights Due to a Felony Conviction – The Sentencing Project](#)

supervision.² Furthermore, paying legal financial obligations is difficult or impossible for many formerly incarcerated Wisconsin residents, with heightened impacts on communities of color.³

Felony disenfranchisement laws do not serve any legitimate criminal legal purpose: they have no meaningful punitive, deterrent, or restorative value. Allowing restoration of voting rights does not change someone's ongoing legal duty to pay court ordered fines, fees, and restitution. Nor has any study ever shown that withholding the right to vote increases the likelihood that someone will pay those debts. To put it plainly: you can't squeeze blood from a stone; if someone is financially unable to pay their legal debts, nothing can make them. Conversely, studies do show that restoring the right to vote improves individuals' connection to and engagement with their communities while incarcerated, as well as their transition back into society post-release.⁴ Consider a scenario in which two people have been convicted of the same crime and have been ordered to pay the same amount of restitution. The only material difference between these two individuals is that one is rich and one is poor. Would it be just if the poor person is indefinitely denied suffrage while the rich one buys their constitutional right back? Such a system is not only likely unconstitutional; it is fundamentally out of step with American values. And at a time when so many Wisconsinites are struggling to stay afloat, creating new laws that discriminate based on wealth would be particularly disheartening.

Of further concern, the statute does not make clear whether it applies to only individuals after its effective date, or whether it would apply retroactively to individuals who have not completed financial obligations. If it is applied retroactively, it would certainly violate the U.S. and the Wisconsin Constitutions. Even if it is not applied retroactively, it will likely cause significant confusion among both voters and election officials.

In sum, Senate Bill 95 / Assembly Bill 87 would bring Wisconsin backwards, create unnecessary confusion for individuals seeking to understand their eligibility, and deny individuals' fundamental right to vote simply because they cannot pay their way to the ballot. Felony disenfranchisement already silences tens of thousands of Wisconsinites. These are fathers, mothers, daughters, and sons who live and work in their communities. They deserve a voice in our democracy and a say in the future of the state. We strongly oppose legislation that creates a financial barrier to civic participation, and we urge you to veto this bill.

Sincerely,

² *Id* at 18-19. See also [Wisconsin Population by Race & Ethnicity - 2025 Update | Neilsberg](#)

³ Campaign Legal Center & the Georgetown Law Civil Rights Clinic, Can't Pay, Can't Vote: A National Survey on the Modern Poll Tax, 39

(2019) https://campaignlegal.org/sites/default/files/2019-07/CLC_CPCV_Report_Final_0.pdf.

⁴ See, e.g., Guy Padraic Hamilton-Smith & Matt Vogel, The Violence of Voicelessness: The Impact of Felony Disenfranchisement on Recidivism, 22 BERKELEY LA RAZA L.J. 407 (2012); [USOU_05_18990.p65](#)

Campaign Legal Center
Leaders of Kenosha
Wisconsin Interfaith Voter Engagement Campaign
We Own It
League of Women Voters of Wisconsin
Wisconsin Faith Voices for Justice
ACLU of Wisconsin
Common Cause Wisconsin
Wisconsin Democracy Campaign
Wisconsin Conservation Voters
All Voting is Local Action
Fair Elections Center
Law Forward
Wisconsin Council of Churches
EX-incarcerated People Organizing (EXPO)



Tony Evers

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

August 8, 2025

TO THE HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THE ASSEMBLY:

I am vetoing Assembly Bill 87 in its entirety.

This bill creates additional barriers to restoring an individual's constitutional right to vote based on certain previous criminal convictions.

The right to vote is a fundamental core value of our democracy. In Wisconsin, when an individual completes their court-ordered sentence, their constitutional right to vote is restored without any additional barrier or process. This bill would create additional barriers to make it harder for individuals who have completed their sentences to have their right to vote restored. My promise to Wisconsinites has always been that I will not sign legislation that makes it harder for eligible Wisconsinites to cast their ballot. I will continue to keep that promise.

I am vetoing this bill in its entirety because I object to creating new barriers that could prevent individuals who have completed their court-ordered sentence from having their right to vote restored.

I am also vetoing this bill because I object to limiting the discretion of judges to address the circumstances in front of them by creating a separate restitution procedure for certain crimes. I am concerned that this provision of the bill would set a precedent that would elevate some crime victims over others.

I remain steadfast in my support for crime victims and survivors and the services, programs, and providers they need to recover, be successful, and thrive. I will continue to pursue and advocate for the necessary, significant investments they need and deserve. I look forward to working with the Legislature during this legislative session to support crime victims and survivors, reduce recidivism, and improve community safety.

Respectfully submitted,

Tony Evers
Governor