



Citizenship Rights Restoration in Tennessee

A guide for navigating and helping others
navigate the court petition process



Foreward from Free Hearts

At Free Hearts, we know that restoring your right to vote is about so much more than paperwork, court forms, or eligibility requirements. It is about reclaiming your voice. It is about dignity. It is about being seen as a full participant in your community again.

For too long, the process of voting rights restoration in Tennessee has been complicated, confusing, and at times discouraging. Many people have done everything they were told to do, completed their sentences, worked hard to rebuild their lives, only to be met with barriers that make it feel like the door is still closed.

We want you to know you are not alone in this.

This guide was created with you in mind, the person trying to navigate this process, and the family members, advocates, and organizers who are walking alongside you. Whether you are just starting or have been trying for years, this resource is here to make the path clearer and more possible.

We also want to be honest. This process is not perfect. There are still challenges, inconsistencies, and systems that were not designed with our communities in mind. But we have also seen what is possible when people come together. We have seen individuals successfully restore their rights. We have seen communities organize, advocate, and push for change. And we have seen laws begin to shift because directly impacted people refused to be silent.

That is the spirit behind this guide.

To those seeking to restore your rights, your voice matters. Your past does not erase your value or your right to have a say in the future of your community. Do not let this process make you feel otherwise.

To those supporting others, your role is critical. This work requires patience, care, and a commitment to walking with people, not ahead of them. This guide is a tool. But the real power is in the people using it.

We believe in a future where no one is shut out of democracy because of their past. Until that future is fully realized, we will continue to do this work together.

With care and determination,

Dawn Harrington, Executive Director & Keeda Haynes, Senior Legal Counsel

We are here to help at every step of the way. Contact us at RestoreYourVote@CampaignLegal.org.

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Introduction

Felony disenfranchisement laws silence the voices of over 4 million Americans who are banned from the polls today. Approximately 72 percent of these disenfranchised voters are living in their communities and no longer in prison but are not able to vote.¹ Moreover, there are an additional 19 million people across the United States who have felony convictions who are able to vote under law but, because of persistent misinformation, many believe that they cannot vote.

Felony disenfranchisement is a blight on American democracy. We are among only a small group of modern democracies that take away the right to vote for criminal convictions at all, much less after prison. Many felony disenfranchisement laws were deliberately designed to disempower Black voters. They continue to disproportionately impact people of color and distort our democracy. Disenfranchisement not only impacts individuals with past convictions; it also disempowers the communities to which many belong.

Americans with past felony convictions work, pay taxes, and should have a say in deciding their community's and the nation's laws that directly impact their lives. Denying these citizens with past felony convictions the opportunity to fully integrate as members of society sends the message that they will permanently be treated as second-class citizens. Studies have shown that restoring the vote to persons leaving prison could aid their transition back into community life.

Half of states do not disenfranchise people who are not incarcerated (two of those and Washington, DC do not disenfranchise at all). Fifteen states restore voting rights upon sentence completion. Ten states including Tennessee, have additional burdensome requirements, even after a person has been fully released and is back living in their community.

All Tennesseans convicted of felonies after May 1, 1981 lose their "citizenship rights," including the right to vote, the right to run for elected office, the right to serve on a jury, the right to serve as a fiduciary, and the right to own a gun. Additionally, Tennessee has long had difficult and burdensome rights restoration processes. As a result, it has one of the largest populations of people who cannot vote because of a prior felony conviction at over 400,000. The law denies the right to vote to nearly 10% of the entire state-wide voting-age population, including more than 20% of the adult Black voting-age population.²

¹ Christopher Uggen, et al., *Locked Out 2024*, The Sentencing Project at 7, <https://www.sentencingproject.org/app/uploads/2024/10/Locked-Out-2024-Four-Million-Denied-Voting-Rights-Due-to-a-Felony-Conviction.pdf>.

² *Id.* at 18-19.

In 2025, the Tennessee legislature overhauled the rights restoration process for people convicted of felonies. Now, in order to restore the right to vote, the right to own a gun, and or other civil rights, Tennesseans must file a petition with a court. To be eligible to file the petition, you must have been discharged from all prison, probation, or parole on your felony sentence. Additionally, to restore the right to vote you must have paid all victim restitution and be current on any child support obligations or, if you owe backpay, you must have been compliant with any court ordered payment plans for at least a year. If you were convicted of certain crimes during certain time periods you can never restore the right to vote. Even if someone meets all of the eligibility criteria, the judge may decide not to grant the petition.

This document constitutes information, not legal advice nor an offer of legal services, and Campaign Legal Center (“CLC”) makes no guarantee that following the steps below will result in restoration of citizenship rights. Additionally, it is the petitioner’s responsibility to ensure that all information on the petition and in any of the other documents filed with a court is correct and complete to the best of their knowledge. **Knowingly filing incorrect information with the court could result in further criminal charges.** If you find that you need additional assistance with the process, contact a lawyer or reach out to CLC or Free Hearts.

The Steps to Petition for Restoration of Citizenship Rights

1. Assess Eligibility

In Tennessee, all people convicted of felonies after May 17, 1981 in Tennessee lose their citizenship rights, including the right to vote, the right to run for elected office, the right to serve on a jury, the right to serve as a fiduciary, and the right to possess a gun.

IMPORTANT: If all of your felony convictions were prior to May 17, 1981, you have not lost the right to vote. You can vote even if you are currently incarcerated. Contact an attorney to assess how your conviction(s) may have impacted other citizenship rights, outside of the right to vote.

In order to apply for restoration of any citizenship rights, a person must have completed their entire sentence including prison, probation, and parole for all felony convictions.

People on probation or parole, or in prison for felony convictions are not yet eligible to restore any citizenship rights. A person who is on unsupervised probation or parole is still considered to be serving their sentence and not yet eligible for rights restoration.

Any person who has completed, discharged, or been pardoned from their felony sentence of prison, probation, or parole is eligible to petition to restore their right to serve on a jury and be a fiduciary. However, there are special conditions that must be met in order to restore the right to vote, right to run for elected office, or the right to possess firearms. So, the first step must be to assess which citizenship rights a person is eligible to restore. If a person is eligible for some rights but not others, they can apply to restore only the rights that they are eligible for and those should be granted to them – except for the right to possess firearms which can only be restored alongside all other citizenship rights.

The initial assessment will help you or the petitioner move forward in deciding which rights to seek. However, sometimes, upon gathering court records (see, step 2) people may find that they do not qualify for certain rights.

We are here to help at every step of the way. Contact us at RestoreYourVote@CampaignLegal.org.

The Right to Vote:

A. Must not owe any victim restitution on felony conviction(s).

If the person is not certain whether they owe restitution, there are a few places to look for records. The original court records will show if any restitution was imposed at sentencing. If restitution was imposed, the Department of Correction (via probation or parole officers) or the court may have records of payments collected. Sometimes these debts are turned over to private collection agencies which may have records.

B. Must be current on child support for at least one year.

Tennessee is the only state that requires people to be current on child support payments in order to restore their right to vote. If a person has been ordered to pay child support that means that they either cannot have any backpay (called “arrears” or “arrearages”) or if they do, they must have been compliant on court ordered payments for one year.

If a person is unsure if they owe child support, they may call the Tennessee Department of Human Services to inquire.

You can find contact information for local child support offices by visiting Child Support Contacts and selecting their county from the drop down box on the website.

If someone is unsure of the correct office to contact, they should call the One DHS Contact Center at +1-833-772-TDHS (8347).

C. Cannot have any permanently disqualifying convictions as defined by the list at the date of conviction.

At different points in time, the Tennessee legislature has passed laws declaring that people convicted of certain crimes can **never** vote in Tennessee. These laws can only apply to people convicted after the date of passage, so the “permanently disqualifying” crimes vary depending on the date of conviction.

There are no permanently disqualifying crimes for convictions prior to July 1, 1986. (Keep in mind that convictions prior to May 18, 1981 do not take away the right to vote.)

Check the following chart for each felony conviction.

July 1, 1986 - June 30, 2006	July 1, 1996 – June 30, 2006	July 1, 2006 – Present
First-degree murder	Any degree of murder	Any degree of murder
Aggravated rape	Any degree of rape, including aggravated rape	Any degree of rape, including aggravated rape
Treason	Treason	Treason
Voter fraud (any offense in Tenn. Code Ann. § 2-19, including attempts, conspiracy, or solicitations)	Voter fraud (any offense in Tenn. Code Ann. § 2-19, including attempts, conspiracy, or solicitations)	Voter fraud (any offense in Tenn. Code Ann. § 2-19, including attempts, conspiracy, or solicitations)
		Bribery (Tenn. Code Ann. § 39-16-1),
		Misconduct involving a public official or employee (Tenn. Code Ann. § 39-16-4)
		Interference with government operations (Tenn. Code Ann. § 39-16-5), including submitting false reports and tampering with evidence
		Any sexual offense or violate sexual offense designated as a felony (Tenn. Code Ann. § 40-39-202) where the victim was a minor

The Right to Run for Office:

The right to run for office cannot be restored if the person was convicted of a felony for actions taken while holding public office and the offense was committed in the person's official capacity or involved the duties of the office.

If a person has never held public office prior to their felony, they should be able to restore their right to run for public office.

The Right to Possess Firearms:

Gun rights restoration laws are not always clear and there may be additional barriers to legally possessing firearms under federal law, restrictions on the possession of certain types of firearms, or different rules when you visit different states. A person seeking to restore their right to possess a gun should consult an attorney for a complete assessment. We are providing this information for the sole purpose of helping you or the petitioner understand the options on the petition for citizenship rights restoration.

Certain types of convictions and other conditions may prevent a person from ever restoring their right to possess firearms.

Disqualifying convictions include:

- Felony convictions for violent crimes or involving the use of a deadly weapon.
- Felony drug offenses.
- Convictions for stalking.
- Convictions for driving under the influence twice within the prior ten years or once within the prior five years.
- Misdemeanor of domestic violence.
- If the petitioner is under 25, a juvenile delinquency on or after July 1, 2024 for one of the following offenses:
 - (A) Aggravated assault (Tenn. Code § 39-13-102)
 - (B) Aggravated assault against a first responder or nurse (Tenn. Code § 39-13-116)
 - (C) Homicide (any violation of Tenn. Code § 39-13-201-219)
 - (D) Robbery (any violation of Tenn. Code § 39-13-401-404)
 - (E) Burglary (any violation of Tenn. Code § 39-13-1001-1004)
 - (F) Aggravated cruelty to animals (Tenn. Code § 39-14-212)
 - (G) A threat of mass violence (Tenn. Code § 39-16-517) or
 - (H) A crime involving the use or display of a firearm.

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Other conditions that prevent people from legally possessing firearms include:

- If the person received a pardon, and the pardon states that they cannot restore their right to possess a gun.
- Being adjudicated as “a mental defective” by a court.
- Being subject to a protective order that includes finding that a person is a credible threat to physical safety or explicitly prohibits the use, attempted use, or threatened use of physical force against an intimate partner or child.

If a person does not qualify for restoration of firearm rights, or are not sure, they may still proceed with petitioning to restore other citizenship rights.

2. Gather All Supporting Records

The next step is to gather all court records from any felony conviction. Misdemeanor convictions, municipal or traffic violations, juvenile delinquencies, and charges that never resulted in convictions should not be included.

Felony conviction records from each case must be gathered. This includes records from states other than Tennessee and any federal court records, if the person has any felonies from those states or courts.

Tennessee State Felony Convictions

For Tennessee state felony convictions, you must request records from each county court where you have a conviction. You may call or visit the court to request these records. You should ask for the complete records of conviction, including any information on victim restitution.

If you are not sure where you might have convictions or whether a certain charge resulted in a felony conviction, you may order a statewide records search from the Tennessee Bureau of Investigations at <https://tbibackgrounds.tbi.tn.gov/Toris/>. That search will cost \$29 and will not provide you with all of the records you need to petition (you will still have to request those from the individual courts) but it will give you complete information about where and when your convictions in Tennessee occurred.

These are the best contacts to seek records in Davidson and Shelby counties:

Davidson County

Aloha Morgan, Deputy Clerk & Compliance Officer

E-mail: amorgan@jnsnashville.gov

Phone: 615-862-5601 Ext – 71538

Clerk's office: 615-862-5601

Address: 408 2nd Avenue North - Suite 2120 Nashville, TN 37201

Website: ccc.nashville.gov

If the file has been archived, it may take a day or two to pull, otherwise, they may be ready in hours. You will have to go to the office in person to pick up the records.

Shelby County

Shelby County Criminal Court Clerk's Office

Phone: (901) 222-3200

Address: 201 Poplar Avenue Suite 3034 Memphis, TN 38103

Website: Shelby County, TN - Criminal Court Clerk's Office

Federal Court Felony Records

For federal court records, the best place to start is to contact the clerk at the district court of conviction.

For the Federal Court in the Middle District of Tennessee, you can email the request to: copy-request@tnmd.uscourts.gov

Out-of-State Felony Records

The best way to initiate a request for out-of-state records is to contact the court where the conviction occurred. Sometimes it can be challenging to obtain these records. We are here to help if you run into trouble.

Child Support Records

For child support records, you will need to contact the Tennessee Department of Human Services: Find information on local offices here

<https://www.tn.gov/humanservices/for-families/child-support-services/child-support-office-locator.html>

Or call +1-833-772-TDHS (8347).

3. Prepare the Petition

The next step is to prepare the petition, which is the main document that will be filed with the court requested restoration of citizenship rights.

a. Fill out the Petition

We have created an online tool that allows you to fill in a template petition while determining eligibility. It can be found at <https://bit.ly/petitionforcitizenship>.

You may also use the very helpful toolkit created by Legal Aid of Middle Tennessee, found here: <https://las.org/restoration-of-rights/>.

Or, you may fill in the blank petition at the end of this packet on page [xx] which is the *pro se* petition form approved by the Tennessee Supreme Court.

When filling out the petition, you or the person applying should have already gathered all of the records from your cases (see step 2). Use these documents to ensure that the information you write into the petition is accurate. If you are unsure of how to answer a question, it is best not to guess. Contact an attorney or reach out to us for clarification.

FAQ: Which is the right court to file in?

A petition can be file either in the court where the person was convicted or in the county where they reside. If the person has multiple convictions across different counties, it is likely best to file in the county of residence. If they have a federal or out-of-state conviction, they should file where they reside.

How to write a strong merits statement

The petition to the court must include a merit statement, which is a statement of reasons why the petitioner believes their citizenship rights should be restored. For people seeking restoration, the statement can strengthen your petition by allowing you to speak directly to the court in your own words. It is important that the petitioner writes this section. Here are some tips to help:

The merits statement can help:

- Show accountability and personal growth
- Provide context about your progress since completing your sentence
- Demonstrate your commitment to meeting requirements and staying on track
- Help the court better understand who you are today
- Reinforce the information included in your support letters and documents

It is your opportunity to present yourself beyond forms and paperwork.

A strong merits statement should:

- Be respectful and written in your own voice
- Acknowledge responsibility without going into unnecessary detail
- Focus on your current stability (work, family, responsibilities)
- Highlight steps you've taken to move forward
- Express why restoring your right to vote is meaningful to you

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Keep in mind:

- Keep your statement to 3-5 paragraphs
- Be clear and direct
- Focus on the present and future, not just the past
- Avoid re-arguing your case or discussing detailed circumstances of your conviction

Sample merits statement

My name is [Your Name,] and I am respectfully requesting the restoration of my right to vote [and other rights of citizenship].

Since completing my sentence(s), I have worked to take responsibility for my actions and move forward in a positive direction. I understand the importance of accountability, and I have made a consistent effort to meet the requirements expected of me.

Over time, I have focused on building stability in my life. I am currently [employed at / working toward / supporting my family by...], and I have been committed to maintaining that stability. I have also made it a priority to [stay compliant with requirements, support family, complete programs, or other relevant efforts.]

I take this process seriously. Restoring my right to vote would allow me to more fully participate in my community and continue moving forward in a meaningful way. [other reasons why voting matters to me].

I am committed to continuing this path and making positive contributions to my community.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

*Respectfully,
[Your Name]*

b. Fill out the indigency affidavit (optional, if applicable)

Generally, the person who is petitioning for citizenship rights restoration must pay the costs of filing. This can range from \$50-\$250, depending on the court. If the petitioner is low-income and unable to pay that cost, an “indigency affidavit” may be included with the filing. This asks the court to waive the fees associated with filing because the petitioner cannot pay it. This document asks for detailed financial information.

If you use our form to create the petition and check the box requesting that the court makes a finding of indigency, the form will provide a blank waiver of indigency with the documents to print. A copy of the blank waiver is on page xx and available here:

https://www.tncourts.gov/sites/default/files/uniform_civil_affidavit_of_indigency.pdf.

c. Gather letters of support (Optional)

While not required, a petition may also include support letters from friends, family, neighbors, and other members of the community can also help the court in its decision. These could be family members, friends, or others who can speak to your character, like teachers, mentors/mentees, or faith leaders. These support letters help demonstrate who the person seeking restoration is today, their stability, and the community support they have as they move forward.

We are here to help at every step of the way. Contact us at RestoreYourVote@CampaignLegal.org.

A strong support letter should:

- Clearly state who the writer is and their relationship to the petitioner
- Describe the petitioner's character using specific examples
- Show the petitioner's growth, responsibility, and stability
- Acknowledge their progress without focusing on past details
- Explain how the writer will continue to support the petitioner

Support letters are most effective when they are specific, honest, and focused on the present.

Sample Support Letter for Voting Rights Restoration

[Date]

*Honorable Judge [Last Name]
[Name of Court]
[Address]*

Re: Support for [Full Name of Petitioner]

Dear Judge [Last Name],

My name is [Your Name], and I am writing in support of [Full Name of Petitioner] as they seek to restore their right to vote. I have known [Petitioner's Name] for [X years] as their [relationship], and I have had the opportunity to witness their growth, character, and commitment to moving forward in their life.

[Petitioner's Name] is someone I would describe as [2–3 qualities, e.g., responsible, resilient, committed to family]. For example, [provide a specific, real example that shows responsibility, stability, or growth, employment, caregiving, community involvement, consistency, etc.]. These actions reflect the effort they have made to build a stable and positive life.

I understand that the court considers whether an individual has taken accountability and made meaningful progress. From what I have seen, [Petitioner's Name] has taken their responsibilities seriously and has worked to meet the requirements expected of them. They have remained committed to supporting themselves and their family, and to being a positive presence in their community.

I am confident that restoring [Petitioner's Name]'s right to vote would support their continued growth and full participation in our community. This step is meaningful, and I believe they will take it seriously.

As someone who knows them well, I will continue to support [Petitioner's Name] by [be specific if possible, housing, transportation, emotional support, accountability, helping them stay on track, etc.] They are not navigating this process alone.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Please feel free to contact me at [phone/email] if you need any additional information.

Sincerely,

[Name]

[Contact information]

We are here to help at every step of the way. Contact us at RestoreYourVote@CampaignLegal.org.

4. File the Petition

Once you have gathered your records, filled out the petition and proposed order, completed an indigency waiver, if applicable, and gathered any letters of support, you should bring all of those materials to the court to file them. Please see the checklist below.

You can file either in the court where you were convicted or in the county where you reside. If you have multiple convictions across different counties, it is likely best to file where you reside. If you have a federal or out-of-state conviction, you should file where you reside.

To file, you will need to speak with the clerk who can give you further instruction. There will likely be filing fees, which range from \$50-\$250 depending on the court. If you are low-income and unable to pay, you may apply for a waiver of indigency using the form described above in Section 3(b). They should have copies of that form to complete at the court but please note that it asks for specific financial information, so it is easiest to complete it in advance.

****Please note: all TN counties are moving toward e-filing, though some are still in transition. If you would like to file online, rather than in person, follow the instructions below.***

- ***E-filing website: <https://go.tybera.net/tncis/>***
- ***The e-filing system includes a drop-down menu showing all participating counties.***
- ***Users must set up an account to file, which can then be used across all participating courts. Please note that unless you are an attorney, the account should be set up by the petitioner. You may not file on their behalf.***
- ***Account setup is straightforward and typically approved within 24 hours.***
- ***In smaller or non-e-filing counties, clerks' offices will often accept filings via email.***
- ***Calling ahead is recommended to confirm the county's process.***

Use this checklist to make sure you include everything you need:

- Petition for restoration of citizenship rights
 - Double check that all information is true and correct to the best of your knowledge and consistent with the records you have gathered.
 - Make sure you have signed the declaration on the last page of the petition.
- Proposed order for restoration of citizenship rights
- Records of all felony convictions sufficient to show type and date of conviction, date of sentence completion, and whether restitution was ordered and owed.
- Records from Department of Human Services showing currency on child support (if applicable and available. If you do not have proof of currency in writing, the relevant officials will seek this information from the Department.)
- Indigency waiver, (optional and if applicable)
- Letters of support (optional)

Once filed, you will receive a case number. Be sure to keep a record of that.

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5. Appear in Court (if required)

Once the petition is filed, the court will notify certain officials, and they will have an opportunity to weigh in to oppose the petition within 30 days. They should only do so on the grounds that they believe the petitioner is ineligible for restoration of one or more of the requested rights. If your petition is opposed, you may want to contact us.

The court can decide to grant or deny the petition simply on the documents filed, or it may request a hearing, which would require the petitioner to appear in court. After filing, you should monitor your phone and email for a notification regarding the status of your petition and whether you have been requested to appear for a hearing.

If you are helping someone with their petition, unless you are a lawyer, you may not speak on their behalf in court. To the person applying: if a hearing is called you must appear in court. If you have an unmovable conflict, you should call the clerk of court to try to reschedule and provide alternative availability during the court's operating hours. Here are some tips for appearing in court.

Preparing Before Court

- Read your petition before the hearing so you are familiar with everything that was filed.
- Bring copies of your petition and any supporting documents, such as letters of support, certificates, proof of employment, or other documents submitted with your petition.
- Know the basic timeline of your conviction(s), completion of your sentence, and the positive steps you have taken since then.
- Arrive at least 30 minutes early to allow time for parking, security, and finding the correct courtroom.

What to Wear

- Dress as neatly and professionally as possible. Business or business casual attire is a good choice.
- Avoid clothing with offensive language or graphics.
- Remove hats and silence your phone before entering the courtroom.

Courtroom Etiquette

- Be respectful to everyone, including court staff.
- Stand when the judge enters the courtroom unless instructed otherwise.
- Address the judge as "Your Honor."
- Speak clearly and only when it is your turn.
- Do not interrupt the judge or anyone else who is speaking.

Answering Questions

- Listen carefully to each question before answering.
- Answer honestly and directly.
- If you do not understand a question, it is okay to politely ask for clarification.
- Keep your responses focused on the question being asked.
- If asked why you are seeking restoration, explain what it means to you and how it will help you participate in your community and civic life.

If Asked About Your Past

- Focus on the positive changes you have made since your conviction, such as:
 - Employment or career growth
 - Education or training

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- Volunteer work or community involvement
- Family responsibilities
- Faith (If applicable)
- Be prepared to explain how restoring your voting rights fits into your continued commitment to being an engaged member of your community.

Remember

- The hearing is not about being perfect. It is an opportunity for the court to hear about your rehabilitation and why you meet the legal requirements for restoration.
- Stay calm, be respectful, and answer questions truthfully.
- Community, family, or friend support is always encouraged.

The judge wants to hear from you. Be yourself, be honest, and don't feel like you need to have the "perfect" answer. Your story, your growth, and your commitment to moving forward are what matter most.

6. Register to Vote

If the petition is granted, the petitioner will need to obtain a certified copy of the order restoring your voting rights and then bring it to the local elections office to register to vote. It is often easiest to obtain the order in person at the courthouse, but if you are unable to go in person, you can try calling and asking if they will mail it. It is possible that the clerk of court will try to charge a fee for the certified order - this may vary from county to county. Please contact us if you are charged a fee to obtain the certified order restoring the right to vote.

Once you have the order, you should bring it to your local elections office to register to vote. You can find a list of all election offices here: https://tnsos.org/elections/election_commissions.php. At the office, you will need to complete a voter registration form. You will need to disclose your conviction on the registration form and check the box saying that your rights have been restored, then submit the certified order with your form. You may also submit the order and the registration form by mail. The registration form is available online here: <https://sos.tn.gov/elections/services/register-to-vote-paper-form-mail-in-or-hand-deliver>.

We know this process can be daunting but please know that we are here to help at every step of the way. We firmly believe that democracy works best when all people can participate.

Your voice matters.

Contact us at RestoreYourVote@CampaignLegal.org

7. Index

- a. Fact sheet on recent changes to the citizenship petition process**
- b. Pro se petition to restore voting rights**
- c. Uniform request for indigency**

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Updates to Tennessee's Voting Rights Restoration Law

Tennessee's voting rights restoration laws have changed *a lot* in the past three years. Here's how they work as of March 2026:

All Tennesseans convicted of felonies after May 18, 1981 lose the right to vote.ⁱ For decades, the only way to restore the right to vote was to go to court and petition a judge.ⁱⁱ In 2006, the state created a new separate process to restore voting rights by obtaining a "Certificate of Restoration" from the Tennessee Department of Correction.ⁱⁱⁱ But that process was a mess and only a tiny percentage of eligible people were able to get restored.^{iv} In 2023, under pressure to make common-sense improvements to the process, state election officials decided instead to blow it all up. Officials created illogical, nearly impossible requirements: you had to *both* go to court to petition and obtain a Certificate of Restoration.^v They even decided that a person could not restore their right to vote unless they restore their right to own a gun.^{vi}

Since then, the legislature has stepped in, passing two rounds of new laws governing voting rights restoration in 2025^{vii} and 2026.^{viii}

HOW DO YOU RESTORE THE RIGHT TO VOTE IN TENNESSEE TODAY?

Currently, the *only* way to restore your right to vote in Tennessee is by petitioning a court.

The petition may be filed in the court where you were convicted or where you reside.^{ix} You may request to restore the right to vote, the right to run for office, the right to serve on a jury, the right to serve as a fiduciary, and the right to possess firearms, but some of the rights have different requirements and the court will only grant restoration of the rights that you are eligible for.^x

TO BE ELIGIBLE FOR VOTING RIGHTS RESTORATION, YOU MUST MEET ALL OF THE FOLLOWING CRITERIA

- Have finished your felony sentence including any prison, probation, or parole, or have been pardoned.^{xi}
- You cannot have been convicted of certain crimes during certain time periods.^{xii} The new laws have not changed the list of these permanently disqualifying convictions.
- You cannot owe any victim restitution.^{xiii}
- You cannot owe child support arrears or, if you do, you must have been compliant with any payment orders for one year before petitioning the court.^{xiv}

WHAT DID THE NEW LAWS IN 2025 AND 2026 CHANGE?

- The new laws clarified that felony convictions prior to May 18, 1981 never disqualify a person from voting.^{xv}
- The new laws solidified that the only way to restore voting rights is to go to court. They eliminated the administrative Certificate of Restoration.^{xvi}
- You no longer need to have paid all outstanding court costs in order to be eligible for voting rights restoration.^{xvii}
- You may satisfy the child support requirement even if you owe arrears so long as you have been compliantly paying for one year. Previously, any amount of arrears would disqualify you from eligibility, even if you had been paying it down.^{xviii}
- Voting rights are no longer tied to gun rights. You may restore the right to vote even if you do not or cannot restore your right to possess a firearm.^{xix}

Other important things to know about the court petition process:

- The person filing the petition is responsible for collecting and attaching all of the relevant court records about their felony convictions and showing that they meet the eligibility criteria.^{xx} They must also attest to the accuracy of the information that they provide to the court.^{xxi}
- The Tennessee Attorney General, the Tennessee Election Division, and the local district attorney have the opportunity to oppose petitions for rights restoration, but should only do so on the basis that a person does not meet the eligibility criteria.^{xxii}
- Petitions may be granted without the judge calling for a hearing or the judge may ask the person to appear before the court.^{xxiii}
- Courts may require that the person filing a petition pay the costs of filing, which in some places can be over \$100.^{xxiv} But the petitioner can ask the judge to waive those costs if they cannot afford them. To do so, they should submit an “indigency” affidavit attesting to their finances, a template for which should be available at the court.^{xxv}
- Once you receive an order restoring your voting rights, you still have to obtain a certified copy of it, bring it to your local elections office, and register to vote.^{xxvi}

**FOR QUESTIONS ABOUT THE PETITION PROCESS PLEASE VISIT
RESTOREYOURVOTE.ORG OR BIT.LY/VOTE-RESTORATION-HELP**

HOW DOES TENNESSEE COMPARE TO OTHER STATES NOW?

The 2026 law eliminated the court costs requirement and opened the door for people who are compliant with child support for a year. That’s an important step forward and opens the door for tens of thousands of people to restore their voting rights.^{xxvii} But Tennessee is still bottom of the barrel when it comes to felony disenfranchisement and voting rights restoration. Only a handful of other states explicitly tie the right to vote to payment of legal financial debts^{xxviii} – a modern-day poll tax that allows rich people convicted of crimes to buy the right to vote back, but can leave people who can’t afford to pay disenfranchised forever. Tennessee is the only

state that connects voting rights with child support payments. Tennessee is one of only a handful of states with an extensive list of non-voting related crimes that forever block someone from the ballot box. It's no wonder that Tennessee has the highest rate of disenfranchisement in the country, the third largest population of disenfranchised people (despite being the 15th most populous state), and the highest rates of Black and Latinx disenfranchisement in the country.^{xxix}

The majority of states restore voting rights once a person has completed their prison sentence. It's time for Tennessee to catch up and let all Tennesseans have a voice in their communities.

ⁱ Tenn. Code Ann. § 2-19-143 (a),(b); *see also*, note XV *infra*.

ⁱⁱ 1981 Pub. Act 345, § 7.

ⁱⁱⁱ 2006 Pub. Act 860, § 1.

^{iv} Christopher Uggen, et al., "Locked Out: Estimates of People Denied Voting Rights Due to a Felony Conviction," The Sentencing Project (Oct. 30, 2020)
<https://www.sentencingproject.org/app/uploads/2022/08/Locked-Out-2020.pdf>.

^v Jonathan Mattise and Travis Loller, "Tennessee election officials: Court ruling raises bar for restoring felon voting rights," THE TENNESSEAN (July 24, 2023)
<https://www.tennessean.com/story/news/2023/07/24/tennessee-now-requires-court-order-or-pardon-before-felons-can-vote/70455898007>.

^{vi} See, Evan Mealins, "TN elections official: Before regaining right to vote, felons must be able to own a gun", THE TENNESSEAN (Jan. 23, 2024, 8:09PM)
<https://www.tennessean.com/story/news/2024/01/23/tennessee-voting-rights-officials-consider-linking-gun-voting-rights/72313073007/>.

^{vii} HB 445, SB 407 (2025) <https://capitol.tn.gov/Bills/114/Bill/HB0445.pdf>.

^{viii} SB 336, HB 687 (as amended by HA 602) (2026)
<https://capitol.tn.gov/Bills/114/Amend/HA0602.pdf>.

^{ix} Tenn. Code Ann. § 40-29-102(a).

^x Tenn. Code Ann. § 40-29-103(e).

^{xi} Tenn. Code Ann. § 40-29-102(a)(1-3).

^{xii} *Id.* at (b).

After July 1, 1986	After July 1, 1996	After July 1, 2006
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Voter fraud • Treason • First degree murder • Aggravated rape 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Voter fraud • Treason • Any degree of murder • Any degree of rape 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Voter fraud • Treason • Any degree of murder • Any degree of rape • Sexual offenses of violent sexual offenses that are felonies where the victim was minor (T.C.A. Sec. 40-39-202) • Crimes against the public trust including bribery, misconduct involving public officials and employees, and interference with government operations (T.C.A. Sec. 39-16, parts 1, 4, or 5)

^{xiii} *Id.* at (c)(1).

^{xiv} *Id.* at (c)(2).

^{xv} See, *Gaskin v. Collins*, 661 S.W.2d 865, 867 (Tenn. 1983) (holding that persons convicted of felonies between Jan. 15, 1973 and May 18, 1981 never lost the right to vote and cannot be retroactively disenfranchised); see also, Tenn. Code Ann. § 2-19-143(b) (“The right of suffrage is restored by operation of law on the effective date of this act to a person who forfeited the right of suffrage only because of a felony conviction prior to January 15, 1973.”)

^{xvi} HB 445 at Section 10 (2025) (deleting Tenn. Code Ann. § 40-29 part II which previously contained the Certificate of Restoration process).

^{xvii} SB 336 as amended by HA602 at Section 1 (deleting Code § 40-29-102(c)(2) which contained the court cost requirement).

^{xviii} Tenn. Code Ann. § 40-29-102(c)(3) (2025) as applied by uncodified Elections Division policy.

^{xix} Tenn. Code Ann. § 40-29-103(e)(2)(A-B).

^{xx} *Id.* at (a)(3), (d).

^{xxi} *Id.* at (a)(4).

^{xxii} *Id.* at (c)(1).

^{xxiii} *Id.* at (e)(1).

^{xxiv} *Id.* at (f).

^{xxv} Tennessee Courts, “Uniform Civil Affidavit of Indigency”

https://tncourts.gov/sites/default/files/uniform_civil_affidavit_of_indigency.pdf.

^{xxvi} Tenn. Code Ann. § 40-29-103(g).

^{xxvii} Dr. Traci Burch, Expert Report in *Tennessee NAACP v. Lee* at 12, 15 (Oct. 10, 2023)

<https://campaignlegal.org/document/expert-report-felony-disenfranchisement-and->

[restoration-tennessee](#) (estimating that 10.9% of Tennesseans who have completed their felony sentences owe child support arrears and that 65.4% owe court costs and/or restitution).

^{xxviii} Campaign Legal Center, “Can’t Pay, Can’t Vote: A National Survey on the Modern Poll Tax” (July 1, 2019) https://campaignlegal.org/sites/default/files/2019-07/CLC_CPCV_Report_Final_0.pdf.

^{xxix} Christopher Uggen, et al., “Locked Out 2024: Four Million Denied Voting Rights Due to a Felony Conviction,” The Sentencing Project at 18-20 (Oct. 10, 2024) <https://www.sentencingproject.org/reports/locked-out-2024-four-million-denied-voting-rights-due-to-a-felony-conviction/>.

IN THE CIRCUIT COURT FOR _____ COUNTY, TENNESSEE

IN RE: RESTORATION OF CITIZENSHIP RIGHTS

Case No. _____

(Please Print Full Name)

VERIFIED PETITION FOR RESTORATION OF CITIZENSHIP RIGHTS
PURSUANT TO T.C.A. § 40-29-103

Comes your Petitioner, _____, and declares that he/she has been previously convicted of a felony or felonies as listed and described herein, and is seeking the restoration of the following rights of citizenship:

- Right to serve on a jury
- Right of suffrage
- Right to hold public office
- Right to execute a fiduciary office
- Right to possess a firearm

By filing this Petition, Petitioner recognizes that he/she has the burden of providing evidence and establishing by a preponderance of the evidence eligibility for restoration of each right sought in the Petition. Petitioner acknowledges that the failure to attach satisfactory proof as to each requirement of eligibility means his/her rights of citizenship will not be restored.

In support of the petition, pursuant to T.C.A. § 40-29-102, Petitioner states the following:

1. My full name is _____.
2. My birthdate is _____.
3. I am filing this petition in the county where I reside / was convicted (**check one**).
4. I have the following felony convictions: *(List all Tennessee felony convictions, all out-of-state convictions that would be a felony under Tennessee law, and all federal felony convictions.)*

Date of Conviction	Crime of Conviction	Date of Pardon or Discharge	Case Number

5. For the convictions listed above, the following is true and correct: (**check all that apply**)
- I received a Pardon on the date listed in the chart in paragraph 4.
 - I have been discharged from custody by reason of service or expiration of the maximum sentence imposed by the court on the date listed in the chart in paragraph 4.
 - I have been granted a certificate of final discharge from supervision by the board of parole or equivalent entity from another state, federal government, or county correction authority on the date listed in the chart in paragraph 4.
6. I have / have not (**check one**) been convicted of a crime other than those listed above.
7. I do / do not (**check one**) have criminal charges pending against me.
8. I have / have not (**check one**) been convicted of any of the following felonies under each respective date range:

<p>After July 1, 1986</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Voter fraud • Treason • First-degree murder • Aggravated rape 	<p>After July 1, 2006</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any violation of title 39, chapter 16, part 1, 4, or 5 designated as a felony or any violation containing the same elements and designated as a felony in any other state or federal court • Sexual offenses or violent sexual offenses that are felonies where the victim was a minor set out in T.C.A. § 40-39-202.
<p>After July 1, 1996</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any degree of murder • Any degree of rape 	

9. The following is true and correct: (**check one**)
- The court did not order me to pay any restitution as part of my sentence; or
 - All of the restitution ordered by the court as a part of my sentence has been paid; or
 - For Federal Convictions only, 18 U.S.C. § 3613(b) applies in this case, and therefore the liability to pay has expired.
10. The following is true and correct (required for the right of suffrage): (**check one**).
- The court did not order me to pay any court costs as part of my sentence; or
 - All court costs assessed against me have been paid; or
 - I am indigent at the time of filing this petition for restoration of the right of suffrage and request that the Court find that I am indigent and not required to pay court costs.
11. I am / am not (**check one**) current on all child support obligations, including having any arrearages owed (required for the right of suffrage).
12. I have / have not (**check one**) been convicted of any of the following criminal offenses, which may affect my right to own a firearm, pursuant to T.C.A. § 40-29-103:
- a) A felony crime of violence, an attempt to commit a felony crime of violence, or a felony involving the use of a deadly weapon pursuant to T.C.A. § 39-17-1307(b)(1)(A); or
 - b) A felony drug offense pursuant to § T.C.A. 39-17-1307(b)(1)(B); or
 - c) A misdemeanor crime of domestic violence as defined in 18 U.S.C. § 921, and still subject to the disabilities of such a conviction pursuant to T.C.A. § 39-17-1307(f)(1).

13. I am / am not (**check one**) subject to an order of protection that fully complies with 18 U.S.C. § 922(g)(8) pursuant to T.C.A. § 39-17-1307(f)(1).
14. I am / am not (check one) prohibited from possessing a firearm for having been adjudicated as a mental defective or judicially committed to a mental institution pursuant to T.C.A. § 39-17-1307(i).
15. I have / have not been adjudicated delinquent on or after July 1, 2024 for the offenses listed in T.C.A. § 39-17-1307(j).
16. Below are the reasons I believe that my citizen rights should be restored pursuant to T.C.A. § 40-29-103(a)(2):

Petitioner requests that the above-identified Rights of Citizenship be restored pursuant to T.C.A. § 40-29-103 et. seq and has attached to this petition satisfactory proof, such as certified records; sworn statements; and other documents or information, necessary to demonstrate to the court that Petitioner is both eligible for and merits having rights of citizenship restored.

I DECLARE UNDER PENALTY OF PERJURY THAT THE FOREGOING IS TRUE AND CORRECT PURSUANT TO RULE 72 OF THE TENNESSEE RULES OF CIVIL PROCEDURE.

Signature of Petitioner

Attorney for Petitioner (optional)

Contact Information for Petitioner or Attorney for Petitioner

Address _____

Telephone _____

E-mail _____

_____ Court _____ County _____ Tennessee	<h1 style="margin: 0;">UNIFORM CIVIL</h1> <h1 style="margin: 0;">AFFIDAVIT OF INDIGENCY</h1> <p style="margin: 0;">page 1 of 2</p>	Case Number _____
_____ vs. _____		

I, _____, having been duly sworn according to law, make oath that because of my poverty, I am unable to bear the expenses of this case and that I am justly entitled to the relief sought to the best of my belief. The following facts support my poverty.

1. Full Name: _____ 2. Address: _____
 3. Telephone Number: _____ 4. Date of Birth: _____

5. Names and Ages of All Dependents:
- | | |
|-------|---------------------|
| _____ | Relationship: _____ |
| _____ | Relationship: _____ |
| _____ | Relationship: _____ |
| _____ | Relationship: _____ |

6. I am employed by: _____
 My employer's address is: _____
 My employer's phone number is: _____

7. My Present income, after federal income and social security taxes, are deducted, is: \$ _____

8. I receive or expect to receive money from the following sources:
- | | | | | |
|-----------------------|----------|-----------|-----------|-------|
| AFDC | \$ _____ | per month | beginning | _____ |
| SSI | \$ _____ | per month | beginning | _____ |
| Retirement | \$ _____ | per month | beginning | _____ |
| Disability | \$ _____ | per month | beginning | _____ |
| Unemployment | \$ _____ | per month | beginning | _____ |
| Worker's Compensation | \$ _____ | per month | beginning | _____ |
| Other | \$ _____ | per month | beginning | _____ |

9. My expenses are:
- | | | | | |
|--------------------|----------|-----------|-----------------------------|--------------------|
| Rent/House Payment | \$ _____ | per month | Medical/Dental | \$ _____ per month |
| Groceries | \$ _____ | per month | Telephone | \$ _____ per month |
| Electricity | \$ _____ | per month | School Supplies | \$ _____ per month |
| Water | \$ _____ | per month | Clothing | \$ _____ per month |
| Gas | \$ _____ | per month | Child Care or | \$ _____ per month |
| Transportation | \$ _____ | per month | Court Ordered Child Support | |
| | | | Other | \$ _____ per month |

10. Assets:
- | | | | |
|--------------------------|----------|-------|-------|
| Automobile | \$ _____ | (FMV) | _____ |
| Checking/Savings Account | \$ _____ | | _____ |
| House | \$ _____ | (FMV) | _____ |
| Other | \$ _____ | | _____ |

11. My debts are:
- | | |
|-------------|---------|
| Amount Owed | To Whom |
| _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ |

I hereby declare under the penalty of perjury that the foregoing answers are true, correct, and complete and that I am financially unable to pay the costs of this action.

 PLAINTIFF

ORDER ALLOWING FILING ON PAUPER'S OATH

It appears based upon the Affidavit of Indigency filed in this cause and after due inquiry made that the Plaintiff is an indigent person and is qualified to file case upon a pauper's oath.

_____ Court _____ County _____ Tennessee	<h1 style="margin: 0;">UNIFORM CIVIL AFFIDAVIT OF INDIGENCY</h1> <p style="margin: 0;">page 2 of 2</p>	Case Number _____
_____ vs. _____		

It is so ordered this the _____ day of _____, 20____

JUDGE

DETERMINATION OF NONINDIGENCY

It appearing based upon the Affidavit of Indigency filed in this cause and after due inquiry made that the Plaintiff is not an indigent person because _____.

IT IS ORDERED AND AJUDGED that the Plaintiff does not qualify for filing this case on a pauper's oath.

This the ____ day of _____, 20 _____ .

JUDGE

NOTICE: If the judge determines that based upon your affidavit you are not eligible to proceed under a pauper's oath, you have the right to a hearing before the judge or, in those cases that can be appealed to Circuit Court, a hearing before the Circuit Court judge.