



ST. STEPHEN'S

Ending Homelessness

Goal 4: Restore and preserve voting rights

The Issue

Ex-Offenders are Denied a Basic Right of Citizenship - Voting

Minnesota continually has the largest voter turnout for elections of any state in the country due to efforts over decades to make it easier for people to vote. While voting has been made easier for many people through early voting, mail in ballots, and same day voter registration, people who are homeless often do not have this basic right of citizenship.

In Minnesota, anyone serving a felony conviction, including probation, parole, and supervised release, is barred from voting. This prevents Minnesotans with criminal convictions from having a voice in decisions that affect all Minnesotans. Many of the clients we serve at St. Stephen's are unable to vote due to this barrier. There have also been attempts in Minnesota and around the country to implement stricter voting laws which would effectively continue to disenfranchise people like those we serve at St. Stephen's.

The Update

A bipartisan bill was introduced in the MN House of Representatives during the 2017 Legislative Session to make it easier to restore voting rights for ex-offenders. However, it ultimately stalled in the House and did not pass.

Despite Minnesota's progressive voter laws, there have been attempts by lawmakers to introduce legislation which aims to complicate the voting process for individuals whose identities have been challenged at voting booths through a provisional ballot system. Challenges to identities at polling places often target people of color and ex-felons. MN State Senator Mary Kiffmeyer is the leading proponent attempting to change laws to strip people of their voting rights. So far, her efforts have failed.

The Impact

Many of the people we work with are motivated and work hard to stabilize their lives, support their families, and become productive citizens. Yet too often, they face barriers that make it difficult to succeed. Laws that prevent them from exercising their basic right of citizenship – to vote – make them feel like second class citizens.