Calendar

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monday, July 30, 2018:</td>
<td>Last day to register to vote and to change political party affiliations for state primary elections.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday, August 28, 2018:</td>
<td>State Primary Election.</td>
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<td>Monday, October 8, 2018:</td>
<td>Last day to register to vote for the General Election.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tuesday, November 6, 2018:</td>
<td>General Election Day.</td>
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Voting Information

Voting Climate of Florida

Florida is a swing state where support for the two major political parties is almost even. As a result, Florida elections are often unpredictable. Florida has 29 electoral votes—making it the state with the second largest number of electoral votes. Therefore, Florida has been a key battleground state for presidential races. In the 2016 presidential election, Donald Trump won all 29 votes from Florida – which played a key role in his victory – by a margin of only 1.2%. In the 2012 presidential election, Barack Obama won against Mitt Romney in Florida by a margin of less than 1%, with Obama winning 50% of the vote and Mitt Romney winning 49.1% of the vote.

Bush v. Gore

The pivotal role that Florida plays in presidential elections was highlighted by the presidential election of 2000, the outcome of which depended on Florida’s electoral vote count. For that election, the margin between votes for George W. Bush and Al Gore was close enough to require a mandatory recount under state law. During the recount, controversy arose regarding the manual recount of several counties, leading to a case called Bush v. Gore. Bush sued and argued that the manual recount violated the Equal Protection Clause of the U.S. Constitution because Florida doesn’t have a consistent recount standard across the counties in the state. The Supreme Court ruled in Bush’s favor and determined that there was an Equal Protection Clause violation due to the inconsistent recount standard across counties in Florida and that the previous vote certification would stand. Therefore, Bush became the winner of Florida’s electoral votes, allowing him to win the Electoral College and become President.
After the Supreme Court ruling, different media organizations conducted multiple analyses of the ballots. One of the most striking analyses was by the New York Times (NYT), which found that the ballots from precincts with a Black voter majority were three times more likely to be rejected and thrown out than ballots in white precincts in the 2000 election. They found similar patterns in precincts with large Latinx populations and elderly populations. The NYT analysis criticized the Florida voting system as biased and unreliable.

**The Help America Vote Act & Voter ID Requirements**

As a result of the controversy surrounding the 2000 presidential election, Bush attempted to resolve the issue by passing the Help America Vote Act of 2002 (HAVA), which sought to replace voting machines, reform voter registration, increase access to voting for the disabled, train poll workers, and prevent voter fraud (even though there was no evidence showing organized voter fraud existed). HAVA set out multiple requirements with which states must comply. For example, HAVA required states to set aside funds to replace outdated voting machines with electronic voting machines. It also required potential voters who have not voted in a previous federal election to show valid photo ID and other documents, such as a utility bill showing the name and current address of the voter.

Many scholars have criticized HAVA’s voter ID requirement. Some argued that such a requirement makes the voter registration harder for many residents, including people with low income and transgender individuals. According to one study, as many as 10% of eligible voters do not have and will not get ID that would fit the strict voting ID requirement. For example, a proof of immigration status requirement makes it even harder for many immigrants, especially immigrants who are people of color, to fulfill the requirement. In one Arizona county in 2004, over 75% of new voter registration forms were rejected for lack of adequate proof of citizenship status.

It is especially difficult for immigrants of lower income to obtain the necessary proof of citizenship due to the costly and lengthy ID application process. For example, one of the most common identification of citizenship status is the passport. To obtain one for naturalized citizens, the cost of a passport is $145. It also takes at least three weeks for the person’s passport to arrive (if they chose an expedited method). Due to the slow and expensive process of obtaining a passport, many immigrants may never get a US passport even when they are eligible to obtain one.

In addition, people of color often face extra barriers when obtaining a driver’s license. As a result, many people of color do not have a valid photo ID that would satisfy HAVA’s ID requirement. According to a 2005 study, just 53% of voting age Black people in Wisconsin had a driver’s license, and just 52% of the Hispanic voting age population had a driver’s license. In contrast, 85% of the white voting age population had a driver’s license. Another factor that affects the likelihood of a person having a valid driver’s license is how often the person changes residences. The 2005 study also found that in Wisconsin, 61-75% of people of color moved since 1995 compared to the 40% of white people who moved since 1995. Because people of color move more often, they are less likely to have an accurate driver’s license with their current address.
Transgender individuals also face additional barriers when obtaining a valid photo ID. In Florida, before transgender individuals can even begin the process for updating their name and/or gender marker on their driver’s license, they must do two things. First, they must update their name and gender marker in the social security record. To change their name and gender marker in the social security system, a person must apply through the Social Security Administration and provide several documents with their correct gender. The person has to submit an application for a social security card; an unexpired identification document, such as a driver’s license; proof of U.S. citizenship, such as a passport; and proof of their gender marker change, such as a state-issued birth certificate with the correct gender marker on it. Such documents are often difficult to obtain, especially an updated birth certificate. Second, Florida prevents transgender people from changing their gender marker on their driver’s license without proof of “clinical treatment for gender transition.” This requirement is not only invasive, but it also prevents the many transgender people who cannot or do not wish to medically transition from updating their identity documents. Due to such strict requirements, transgender individuals face numerous obstacles to obtain a photo ID that would satisfy HAVA’s requirement.

Because people of color and LGBTQ individuals face several barriers in obtaining a valid driver’s license, they are less able to satisfy HAVA’s photo ID requirement. As a result, many people of color and LGBTQ individuals are unable to vote and make their voices heard.

**How Do I Vote?**

**Who can register to vote?**

To register to vote in Florida, the individual must be a US citizen and a resident of Florida. The individual must be 18 years old to vote; however, the individual may pre-register to vote at the age of 16. The individual also cannot have been adjudicated mentally incapacitated to vote in Florida or in other states, unless they have had their right to vote restored. Finally, a person who has been convicted of a felony and has not had their civil rights restored cannot vote. If you are unsure whether you are registered to vote, you can check your status at [https://registration.elections.myflorida.com/CheckVoterStatus](https://registration.elections.myflorida.com/CheckVoterStatus).

**How to Register to Vote**

There are three ways to register to vote: online, in person, or by mail. Regardless of the method, you must register to vote at least 29 days before any election (general or primary) to vote in that election. For more information, go to [http://dos.myflorida.com/elections/for-voters/voter-registration/register-to-vote-or-update-your-information/](http://dos.myflorida.com/elections/for-voters/voter-registration/register-to-vote-or-update-your-information/).

**Online Registration**

Online registration application can be submitted through [RegisterToVoteFlorida.gov](http://RegisterToVoteFlorida.gov). To submit the online application, applicants need a Florida driver’s license or Florida ID card distributed by the Florida Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles. To protect applicant’s identity in the online application, applicants will also need the issue date of their Florida ID or driver’s license and the last four digits of their social security number. The online registration application also requires personal
information from the applicant such as name, birthday, and mailing address. To register, the applicant must meet all the requirements for voting (as outlined in the Who Can Vote? Section).

**Registering to Vote in Person**

To vote in an election, an applicant must already be registered to vote or must register to vote at least 29 days before that election day. In addition to downloading and printing the Florida Voter Registration Application (Form DS-DE39) from the internet, forms are available for pickup at Florida driver's license offices, any county Supervisor of Elections office, or the local library. The applicant must take a completed to the applicant’s local county Supervisor of Elections office, to a driver’s license office, a voter registration agency, offices serving people with disabilities, an armed forces recruitment office, a public library, or the Division of Elections.

If the applicant is registering vote for the first time, the applicant will need to provide proof of their identity. Accepted proof of identity is either a valid Florida driver’s license or a Florida ID. If the applicant does not have either of those, the applicant can use the last four digits of their social security number as proof of identification.

Once the application is approved, a voter registration card will be mailed to the applicant within two weeks. If the applicant does not receive the voter registration card within two weeks of submitting their registration form, the applicant should call their local county Supervisor of Elections.

**Registering to Vote by Mail**

To register to vote by mail, the applicant must mail their Florida Voter Registration Application (Form DS-DE39) to the applicant’s county Supervisor of Elections or other location listed under the Registering to Vote in Person section. The county Supervisor of Elections office addresses are listed on page two of the registration form.

**Overseas and Military Voter Registration**

Active military members, merchants residing overseas, and citizens living overseas can register to vote through the Federal Voting Assistance Program.

Overseas applicants should use the Federal Post Card Application (FPCA) form to register and request absentee ballots for the year. The overseas voters must send a new FPCA form every year. Overseas voters may complete their FPCA form through the FPCA online assistant, which asks for the applicant’s state of residence and other personal information. Applicants may register by mail, completing the FPCA form and mailing it to their local election office. Applicants may also register in person. The applicant may pick up a hard copy of the FPCA form from their assigned Voting Assistant Officer.

There are certain recommended dates for absentee ballot mailing, depending on the country in which applicants are residing. If the requested absentee ballot has not been received from the applicant’s state at least 30 days before the election, the applicant can use the emergency backup ballot called the Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot (FWAB). The applicant can complete FWAB using the FWAB online
assistant or can request a copy from the applicant’s Voting Assistant Officer. Once completed, the form must be mailed or faxed (for those living outside of the U.S.) to the applicant’s election office.

**Voting**

**Early Voting**

Early voting begins on the 10th day before the election. The goal of early voting is to increase the amount of opportunities for people to vote and to accommodate those voters who cannot make it to the polls on election day.

During early voting, registered voters can vote at an earlier date at a location and date most convenient to them. Voters who wish to vote early must present a valid photo identification and a signature identification.

**Election Day Voting**

On Election Day, November 6, 2018, voters are required to have a valid photo ID with their signature. A valid photo ID include a Florida driver’s license, US passport, debit or credit card with photo, and military identification. If the voter doesn’t have a photo ID, the individual is still permitted to cast a provisional ballot as long as the signature on the provisional ballot matches the signature in the registration record.

**Vote-By-Mail**

Individuals can also vote by mail if they are unable to go to the polls to vote during early voting or election day voting. The individual must make a request to vote by mail through an online application with County of Supervision Election or through the County of Supervision Election via writing, such as mail or email, telephone call, or in-person visits. Individuals must request a vote-by-mail ballot at least 6 days in advance of the election day.
**Incarcerated LGBTQ People and the Loss of Fundamental Rights**

The Florida Constitution prevents individuals who have been convicted of felonies from exercising their rights to vote, hold public office, and serve on a jury. As a result, more than 1.6 million people, or 10% of Florida’s voting population,”xxxii are barred from voting. LGBTQ people constitute a large part of the incarcerated population, partly due to discrimination in the criminal justice system. Among incarcerated women, more than 40% identify as LGBTQ. LGBTQ people are incarcerated at higher rates and often serve harsher sentences as compared to non-LGBTQ people. The current system also prevents many transgender people from being eligible to vote, especially since one in six transgender people have been incarcerated at some point in their lives. Among transgender individuals, transgender people of color are most impacted. For example, approximately 47% of Black transgender people have been incarcerated at some point in their lives. Currently, thousands of LGBTQ individuals, especially LGBTQ people of color, are currently barred from voting, serving in public office, and sitting on juries.

**Background**

Article VI Section 4(a) of the Florida Constitution states that “No person convicted of a felony, or adjudicated in this or any other state to be mentally incompetent, shall be qualified to vote or hold office until restoration of civil rights or removal of disability.” This prohibits all Florida residents who have been convicted of a felony from voting or hold a public office unless those rights have been restored by the approval of the Executive Clemency Board, which is comprised of the Florida governor and the executive cabinet. Florida residents who have been convicted a felony in another state are also deprived of voting rights in Florida. Convicted felons who did not restore their rights in Florida before moving to another state are also barred from voting in that state as well.

To have their rights restored, people who have been convicted of a felony must wait 5 or 7 years after they have fully completed their sentence, including probation and parole, to apply for restoration of their rights with the Executive Clemency Board. Once the Board finds that the person is eligible to apply, it will enter an investigation phase in which it weighs various factors, such as the applicant’s employment history, criminal history, and mental health issues. Applicants are expected to have printed supportive documentation related to these factors and references that assist the applicant in the process.

After the investigation process, the Board holds a clemency hearing with the governor. These clemency hearings are only held four times a year, and the Board hears 100 cases to restore the eligibility to vote, hold public office, and serve on a jury. Over 20,000 people are caught in the clemency pipeline because the Florida government is unable to hire additional staff to review cases to present to the Board.

After this long process, the governor makes the decision whether to restore these rights to a person convicted of a felony. Two members of the executive cabinet must agree with the governor.

One woman who had to suffer through this long and painful process to clemency was Faith Kiss Cannarile. Ms. Cannarile reported to the Huffington Post that she was arrested at the age of 20 for pushing a police officer during a fight. She was placed on probation and later placed on a longer 18-
month sentence due to smoking marijuana. Since she was convicted of a felony in Florida, Ms. Cannarile was barred for life from voting, holding public office, and serving on a jury. She filled out the application to restore her eligibility to vote and waited 11 years. When she finally got notice of her clemency hearing, Ms. Cannarile had to drive five hours across the state with her daughter to stand before the Executive Clemency Board. During the hearing, the Board asked Ms. Cannarile and her daughter many personal questions. At the end of the hearing, the Board finally decided to grant clemency to Ms. Cannarile, only after her daughter stated that her mother has been an upstanding citizen since her release. Ms. Cannarile explained that she felt sadness during election years because she is very involved politically and was unable to make her voice heard through voting.

Ladetra Denise Johnson had a similar experience with the same long application process for restoration of her rights. She had to drive eight hours to appear before the Executive Clemency Board for her hearing.

**The Right to Vote**

Voting is one of the most effective ways for people to make their voices heard in our government. It is especially important for groups such as LGBTQ people and people of color, whose needs and concerns are often overlooked by government officials.

There are only three nondiscrimination protections in place for LGBTQ people in Florida, and many important areas of life are still not covered. For example, credit and lending are not covered by nondiscrimination laws, which allows companies, including those disbursing student loans, to discriminate against people purely based on their sexual orientation or gender identity. Such discrimination bars many LGBTQ people from using loans to purchase houses, start businesses, and obtain higher education. Florida also does not have nondiscrimination laws in place for adoption and foster parenting by same-sex parents. Allowing adoption agencies and foster care systems to prevent many children from having loving parents purely because of the potential parents’ sexual orientation or gender identity. Furthermore, young LGBTQ people do not have any legal protection in schools. There are no nondiscrimination laws or anti-bullying laws in Florida protecting LGBTQ students. The traumatic experience of being bullied or discriminated against by fellow students or school faculty can affect LGBTQ people for life.

Another LGBTQ issue that is often ignored is violence that targets LGBTQ individuals. Sexual orientation ranks as the third-highest motivator for hate crime incidents – 17% of the total hate crime attacks. Transgender people are especially vulnerable to violence. It is estimated that as many as 50% of transgender people will experience intimate partner violence in their lifetime. Even with the demonstrated high probability of violence towards LGBTQ individuals, Florida laws have minimal protection for the LGBTQ community. While Florida’s hate crime law cover sexual orientation, it does not cover gender identity, leaving transgender, queer, and gender nonconforming people unprotected.

Through voting in general and primary elections, LGBTQ individuals can support bills that protect LGBTQ individuals and elect pro-LGBTQ public officials that would put LGBTQ issues into the political discussion in Florida. The only way to elect pro-LGBTQ officials is through voting, and there are still many LGBTQ
individuals who have been barred from their fundamental right to vote. The Florida Constitution bars individuals with a former felony conviction from voting unless the individual applies for clemency. LGBTQ people are disproportionately impacted by this law. Nationally, more than 40% of incarcerated women in prisons identify as LGBTQ while only 3.5% of the general population of the US identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual. As a result, many LGBTQ women are not allowed to vote because of their felony conviction. Transgender and gender nonconforming individuals are also impacted by this law. According to national statistics, 16% of transgender and gender nonconforming individuals have been sent to jail or prison in their lifetimes. In comparison, only 2.7% of the general U.S. population has been sent to prison or jail in their lifetimes. Since transgender and gender nonconforming individuals have disproportionately been incarcerated, they are also more likely to be ineligible to vote in Florida.

In addition, barring individuals with past felony convictions from voting also affects people of color. Across the United States, over 48% of people in prison are Black. National Black individuals are five times more likely to be incarcerated than white individuals. Latinx people are 1.4 times more likely to be incarcerated than white people.

In Florida, Black people make up only 16% of the general population but 33% of the state’s prison population. One in 22 black adult males are incarcerated. Black defendants also receive longer prison sentences. As a result of these disparities, many people of color are unable to vote. Therefore, their voices and needs are not prioritized in government. Considering the large number of LGBTQ people of color who have felony convictions, concerns specific to them are often not addressed either.

**Right to Serve in Public Office**

Because of Florida’s constitutional restriction, people who have been convicted of a felony are barred from serving in public office. These restrictions, combined with anti-LGBTQ sentiment and violence, prevents many LGBTQ individuals from running for public office. In fact, there are only a few openly LGBTQ public officials in the history of Florida. Voting can help LGBTQ residents elect members of the community into public office to ensure that issues concerning community are prioritized in their government.

**Right to Serve on a Jury**

The Florida Constitution also prohibits people with previous felony convictions from serving on a jury. Juries should consist of the defendant’s peers and be made up of diverse individuals so that an unbiased and just decision can be made. Juries play a key part in keeping our criminal justice system fair for everyone. Unfortunately, the criminal justice system often discriminates against certain groups of people, such as LGBTQ individuals. In one study of both the criminal and civil justice systems, nineteen percent of LGBTQ people reported that they heard a judge, an attorney, or a court employee make negative comments regarding their sexual orientation or gender identity. Sixteen percent of LGBTQ people reported that their sexual orientation or gender identity was brought up during court proceedings when that information was not relevant. Such biases in the court system often lead to disproportional amount of LGBTQ people being incarcerated.
Furthermore, many LGBTQ people also identify as Black and Hispanic/Latinx, increasing their risk of bias and longer sentences in the criminal justice system. To eliminate these disparities, one of the first steps is to ensure that juries and judges who determine guilt and sentences are diverse and unbiased.

**Amendment 4 – The Voting Restoration Amendment**

Amendment 4 aims to restore the eligibility to vote for individuals convicted of most felonies after they have served their complete sentence, including probation, parole, and restitution. If passed, Amendment 4 would amend Article VI Section 4 of the Florida Constitution by adding an additional clause, providing that:

> “any disqualification from voting arising from a felony conviction shall terminate and voting rights shall be restored upon completion of all terms and sentencing including parole or probation.”

The amendment will not restore the eligibility to vote for people who are convicted of murder or a felony sexual offense. Those individuals may only restore their eligibility to vote if they are approved by the Governor and the Executive Clemency Board.

Floridians submitted over a million signatures and 840,000 petitions to get Amendment 4 on Florida’s general election ballot. Amendment 4 will appear on the general election ballot on November 6th, 2018. To restore the eligibility to vote to Floridians with previous felony convictions, 60% of voters must vote yes on Amendment 4. On the ballot, it will appear as “The Voting Restoration Amendment.”

**Call to Action**

Restoring the eligibility to vote to people who have completed their sentence is simply the right thing to do. The long and challenging process to restore the eligibility to vote is broken and must be changed.

One thing that Florida residents who are able to vote can do to restore fundamental rights to those individuals with past felony convictions is to vote in the general election in November 2018. Amendment 4 (the Voting Restoration Amendment) is on the general election ballot. If 60% of voters vote in favor of Amendment 4, the amendment to the constitution would restore the eligibility to vote to those who have been convicted of most felonies and have served their full sentences.

Other ways to make your voice heard is to vote in every primary election and general election in Florida. To ensure issues concerning incarcerated LGBTQ individuals are part of Florida political discussions, pro-LGBTQ public officials must be elected into office. Through voting in primary and general elections in Florida, you can elect officials who support legislation that grant more rights and protections for LGBTQ individuals, including those who are incarcerated.

By voting “yes” on Amendment 4 and making your voice heard through voting in the general and primary elections, LGBTQ individuals in Florida can gain more rights.
Resources

Voting

Register to Vote
Find Your Polling Place

Voting Day Expectations

Amendment 4

Amendment 4

[i] https://www.270towin.com/states/Florida
[ii] https://www.270towin.com/states/Florida
[v] https://uselectionatlas.org/RESULTS/
[vi] https://www.law.cornell.edu/supct/html/00-949.ZPC.html
[ix] https://www.eac.gov/assets/1/6/HAVA41.PDF
[x] https://www.law.cornell.edu/background/HAVA.html
[xi] https://www.eac.gov/about/help-america-vote-act/
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