

Report from the Committee for Voter Outreach to Under-Represented Populations

In early August 2017, League Members Jamie Benvenuti, Sonja Czarnecki and Melissa Wick met with the Douglas County Sheriff's Department Director of Re-entry Mike Brouwer to discuss ways to increase voter registration among ex-felons. Brouwer considered it a duty to meet with a civic organization, but could not conceive of what the League had to offer for his program. That assumption soon changed.

Shortly into our meeting we began a dialogue about how voting is a right taken away from felons but rarely discussed upon release from the penal system; how it is a beneficial engagement with the community; and how we could provide voter registration materials to the Douglas County Jail library along with a myth/fact sheet to clear up some misconceptions. We told Brouwer that we would like permission to train parole officers on how to register people to vote so that they would be able to provide this service at the time of discharge. The more we discussed, the more Brouwer got excited about our proposed program.

At Brouwer's invitation, and with the assistance of Douglas County Clerk Jamie Shew, members of the Lawrence/Douglas County League of Women Voters led a voter education/registration training session in the Douglas County Public Utility Training Room on September 15, 2017. In attendance were approximately a dozen corrections professionals serving the counties of Allen, Anderson, Coffey, Douglas, Franklin, Neosho, Wilson, and Woodson, along with Shew and Brouwer. Representing the League of Women Voters were Kansas League Co-President Cille King, and Jamie Benvenuti and Sarah Vandermast of the Lawrence/Douglas County League's newly formed Committee for Voter Outreach to Under-Represented Populations chaired by Melissa Wick. Co-President Cille King led the presentation while Jamie Shew was there to answer questions as well as to inform participants about the processes currently in place to assist eligible voters in Douglas County.

To supplement the presentation, committee members Jamie Benvenuti and Sarah Vandermast handed out voter information packets put together specifically for the event. These included registration forms, as well as fact sheets about the voting rights of ex-felons in Kansas and benefits to the community of having them become engaged citizens. The presentation was very well-received and the participants were actively engaged throughout. Mike Brouwer was impressed with the simplicity of the voter registration process. Jamie Shew felt the meeting went very well, particularly in the opportunity to dispel some myths by answering attendees' questions. [See examples below]. Brouwer and Shew were also impressed by the enthusiasm of the parole officers to implement voter registration with their charges.

Our efforts will now be directed toward working with the other Kansas Leagues to present this program to the re-entry directors and parole officers in their communities. Jamie Shew has already sent some information to several county clerks. Our first target is to get this information presented on November 2, 2017 when Mike Brouwer will be meeting with parole officers in Salina. Brouwer told us he believes there is time on the agenda for this presentation.

Some of the MYTHS cleared up in the presentation included:

Whether all convicts lose the right to vote; when that right is lost; and whether that loss is permanent.

Felony charges and misdemeanor convictions: only individuals convicted of felonies temporarily lose their right to vote in Kansas. Individuals charged with felonies, but not yet convicted, and those convicted of misdemeanors do not lose their right to vote.

Felony convictions: Individuals who have lost the right to vote due to felony conviction automatically get their rights restored at the completion of their sentence—their sentence includes all terms of probation/parole. However, in order to be eligible to vote, they still need to [re-]register after the completion of their sentence, even if they were registered prior to conviction.

Additional clarifications were made regarding two distinct steps to effective voting –

1. Registering to vote and 2. Obtaining and presenting a valid photo ID for the purpose of voting.

KANSAS

Registering to vote: This can be done via *either* the state form or the federal form. The state form requires proof of citizenship, while the federal form does not. Kansas voters are currently allowed to vote in elections if they have registered with the federal form without providing proof of citizenship. However, if they don't follow the state requirement to submit proof of citizenship, these voters will not receive an auto-generated postcard in the mail informing them of their voter registration or polling place. A lawsuit brought by the LWV and the ACLU against the Secretary of State's requirement to submit proof of citizenship is also pending. It is not yet known if the courts will side with the League and ACLU or with the Secretary of State. If the State prevails, the voters who registered without providing citizenship documents may have to [re-]register once more. For these reasons, the League recommends providing proof of citizenship when registering to vote, even though it is not currently required.

View list of valid citizenship documents here:

<http://www.gotvoterid.com/proof-of-citizenship.html#validdocs>

Voter ID: In Kansas, a valid photo ID is required to cast a ballot. If an eligible voter does not have one and cannot afford one, he or she can get a free photo ID from their local DMV.

View list of valid photo IDs for voting purposes here:

<http://www.gotvoterid.com/valid-photo-ids.html#idlist>

DOUGLAS COUNTY, KANSAS – ADDITIONAL VOTER SUPPORT

If any Douglas County resident needs assistance getting a valid photo ID or birth certificate, he or she may contact Douglas County Clerk Jamie Shew's Office: 785-832-5267 or elections@douglas-county.com. Even if the eligible voter was not born in Kansas, Jamie Shew's election office team will be able to assist in getting the necessary documentation, free of charge, to the voter. He recommends contacting his office ASAP before the next election as it can take several weeks, to months, to receive birth certificates from out of state, depending on the state.

In addition to those already mentioned, the Committee wishes to thank everyone who contributed to this successful event including: League members Sonja Czarnecki and Thea Perry, and Benet Magnuson of Kansas Appleseed. We especially wish to thank Director of Re-entry Mike Brouwer for this special invitation to address a critical need and for his enthusiastic support; and Kansas League Co-President Cille King and Douglas County Clerk Jamie Shew for their expertise and presentations. This would not have happened without their collective participation. We look forward to similar events in the future.

For those who are interested in getting a PDF of the information packet compiled by the Committee, please contact Melissa Wick: wickma@aol.com or phone: 785-550-6160.