



For Immediate Release
Tuesday, October 2, 2018

Contact: Juston Cooper, Deputy Director
720-388-5322, juston@ccjrc.org

Colorado Survey Finds Significant Public Confusion Surrounding Voting Rights of People with Criminal Records; Many Eligible Voters are Widely Believed to Be Ineligible, According to New Report

CCJRC's 'Voting With Conviction' campaign aims to inform citizens that most people involved in the justice system—including those on probation and many in jail—are eligible to vote in Colorado

DENVER — There is significant public confusion surrounding the voting rights of criminal offenders in Colorado, according to a report released Tuesday by the Colorado Criminal Justice Reform Coalition. A statewide survey commissioned by the nonpartisan nonprofit found many eligible voters are widely believed to be ineligible, prompting concerns that some might sit out the upcoming election because they mistakenly believe—or may be wrongly led to believe—they are not allowed to participate. The report, including the full survey results, is available at <http://bit.ly/voting-with-conviction>.

The survey tested Coloradans' knowledge of criminal offenders' voting rights, asking them whether they believe individuals in various stages of the justice system are eligible to vote in the state. It found:

- Only a small majority of Coloradans (57%) know that individuals who have been convicted of a felony or misdemeanor are eligible to vote once they have completed their sentence. That number drops to only about one-third (36%) for respondents who identified as neither white nor Hispanic.
- Fewer than half of Coloradans (43%) know that individuals who are currently on probation for a felony or misdemeanor conviction are eligible to vote.
- Four out of 10 Coloradans (43%) do not know that individuals currently in jail for misdemeanor convictions are allowed to vote from jail, and only 41% were aware that individuals in jail awaiting trial are also eligible.

The survey of 600 Colorado voters was conducted by Public Policy Polling from August 24-26 and has a margin of error of plus or minus 4 percentage points.

"There is a popular and very concerning misconception that people are not allowed to vote if they have a criminal record," said Juston Cooper, deputy director of CCJRC. "People think they have been disenfranchised by the system, so they end up not

exercising their right to vote. This confusion among voters is resulting in a large segment of the population not having its voice heard. We are especially concerned about the disproportionate impact it is likely to have on black voter engagement."

The Sentencing Project reports between 70 million and 100 million people in the U.S. have some type of criminal record, which equates to about one out of every three Americans. There were approximately 77,000 adults on probation in Colorado in fiscal year 2018, according to the Colorado Judicial Department, and CCJRC estimates there are thousands of people in Colorado jails who are eligible to vote.

To combat the public confusion surrounding voting rights in Colorado, CCJRC is ramping up its "Voting With Conviction" campaign, which aims to inform citizens that most people with criminal records—including those still on probation and many currently in jail—are eligible to vote in Colorado. It includes door-to-door canvassing, paid advertising, and other grassroots outreach efforts. The materials direct people to the campaign's website (<https://votingwithconviction.org>), where they can find out if they are eligible to vote. CCJRC is also working to register voters in the Denver County Jail and to promote voter registration and education efforts in jails around the state.

"We need everyone to know that most people with criminal records can vote in Colorado," Cooper said. "That means educating people without criminal records, as well, so that it becomes common knowledge. Voting is a fundamental right in this country, and we cannot afford to have any confusion surrounding it."

#

The Colorado Criminal Justice Reform Coalition is a non-profit organization dedicated to eliminating the overuse of the criminal justice system and advancing community health and safety. For more information, visit <https://www.ccjrc.org>.