

## Update: Florida Rights Restoration Coalition

(Sponsors of Amendment 4, [www.frrc.org](http://www.frrc.org))

On Wednesday, July 1, 2020, Desmond Meade, leader of the Florida Rights Restoration Coalition (FRRRC), and representatives of Families Against Mandatory Minimums (FAMM), and Florida Cares Charity Corporation (Florida Cares/Florida Cares Charity.org) presented a joint webinar. They discussed the stay placed on the implementation of Amendment 4 by the 11<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court of Appeals earlier that day.

Meade described himself as having whiplash from the many reversals since Amendment 4 passed in the general election in 2018 that gave the vote to felons who had completed jail and parole requirements imposed by their sentences:

- the legislature passed a law requiring all felons to pay all fines and fees before being able to vote;
- U.S. District Judge Robert Hinkle declared that law equivalent to a poll tax and voided the requirement on May 24, 2020;
- The 11<sup>th</sup> Circuit put a stay on the lower court's order on July 1 and will hear arguments in August – too late for felons to vote in the August primary.

**The question facing us was, what now?** It was suggested that frustration be channeled constructively – now!

1. Elected Officials – it is critical to be heard.
  - A. Find your candidates
  - B. Follow them
  - C. Hound them
    - Contact them 1 time/day
    - Be everywhere they are: their offices, town halls, festivals, street fairs, etc.
    - Protest at local representatives offices and campaign locations with signs
2. Remember to include the 4 state-wide elected officials (governor, attorney-general, Commissioner of Agriculture and Consumer Affairs, and Chief Financial Officer) and local sheriffs
3. Tell your story to friends, associates and the public (in op-eds, call-in shows, local newsletters, etc.) Why? Because people respond to an issue when they know somebody affected. It becomes personal.
4. FRRRC has collected and paid more than half a million dollars (.5 million) in fines and fees for felons. Approximately 80,000 returning citizens are eligible to vote. Another

70,000 wait. They still encourage felons to contact them if they need help. They also continue to accept money for their Fines and Fees Fund.

FYI, the St. Petersburg Meeting of Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) made a contribution to the Fines and Fees Fund of \$240 in 2020.

5. The governor has not scheduled a clemency hearing in 2020 although that is touted, by the governor's office, as an option for felons along with community service in lieu of money for fees and fines.
6. FRRRC has negotiated with several counties and achieved agreements and processes for resident felons to apply for community service. Hillsborough, Miami-Dade are among them. Pinellas is not. They will continue this effort.
7. Desmond Meade continues to press for those registered, to VOTE VOTE VOTE. The number of registered persons who don't vote could change the outcome of elections if they would only vote!!

Submitted by Gwen Brown, Clerk, Peace and Social Concerns