

STORAGE NAME: h0779s1.er
DATE: March 31, 2000

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON
ELECTION REFORM
ANALYSIS**

BILL #: CS/HJR 779

RELATING TO: Rights of Former Felons

SPONSOR(S): Committee on Election Reform, Representative(s) Reddick and Others

TIED BILL(S): CS/HB 781

ORIGINATING COMMITTEE(S)/COMMITTEE(S) OF REFERENCE:

- (1) ELECTION REFORM (PRC) YEAS 5 NAYS 1
 - (2) JUDICIARY (CJC)
 - (3) LAW ENFORCEMENT & CRIME PREVENTION (CRC)
 - (4) CRIMINAL JUSTICE APPROPRIATIONS (FRC)
 - (5)
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I. SUMMARY:

CS/HJR 779 is a House Joint Resolution proposed to amend Article VI, Section 4, of the Florida Constitution. The Resolution provides that a convicted felon may not register or vote until that right has been restored, *as provided by law*.

The Resolution amends Article VI, Section 4 as follows:

(a) 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. No person convicted of a felony shall be qualified to vote until the person's right to register or vote has been restored, as provided by law. No person adjudicated in this state to be mentally incompetent shall be qualified to vote until removal of disability.

Each house of the Legislature must pass a joint resolution by a three-fifths vote in order for the proposal to be placed on the ballot.

There is an estimated fiscal impact of \$47,000 associated with advertising this amendment.

The constitutional amendment will be effective on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in January following the approval of the amendment by the voters of Florida.

II. SUBSTANTIVE ANALYSIS:

A. DOES THE BILL SUPPORT THE FOLLOWING PRINCIPLES:

- 1. Less Government Yes No N/A
- 2. Lower Taxes Yes No N/A
- 3. Individual Freedom Yes No N/A
- 4. Personal Responsibility Yes No N/A
- 5. Family Empowerment Yes No N/A

For any principle that received a "no" above, please explain:

B. PRESENT SITUATION:

Article VI of the Florida Constitution provides the constitutional framework for elections in the State of Florida. Subsection 4(a) provides general disqualifications as follows:

- (a) 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.

Additionally, section 97.041(2)(b), F.S., provides that a person who has been convicted of any felony by any court of record and who has not had his or her right to vote restored pursuant to law is not entitled to register or vote.

The authority to restore a person's civil rights is bestowed upon the Governor with the consent of at least three members of the Cabinet. Article IV, Section 8(a) establishes the authority for clemency as follows:¹

- (a) Except in cases of treason and in cases where impeachment results in conviction, the governor may, ... with the approval of three members of the cabinet, grant full or conditional pardons, restore civil rights, commute punishment, and remit fines and forfeitures for offenses.

Therefore, a person who has been convicted of a felony and not had his or her civil rights restored by one of the methods prescribed by law, may not vote in Florida.

Amendments to Florida's Constitution may be proposed in several manners. Article XI, Section 1, of the Florida Constitution, provides the Legislature the authority to propose amendments to the Constitution by joint resolution voted on by three-fifths of the membership of each house. The amendment must be placed before the electorate at the

¹ Effective January 7, 2003, Article IV, Section 4 of the Florida Constitution is amended to reduce the number of elected Cabinet officers from six to three. In addition, Article IV, Section 8, relating to Clemency, reduces the number of cabinet members from three to two which, along with the Governor, is required to grant clemency.

next general election held after the proposal has been filed with Secretary of State's office or may be placed at a special election held for that purpose.

C. EFFECT OF PROPOSED CHANGES:

CS/HJR 779 is a House Joint Resolution proposed to amend Article VI, section 4, of the Florida Constitution. The Resolution removes the prohibition placed on a person who has been convicted of a felony to register or vote.

CS/HB 781 is the implementation bill to CS/HJR 779. CS/HB 781 essentially provides that persons convicted of one or more felonies will automatically have their right to vote restored one year after completion and satisfaction of all nonmonetary sentences imposed unless objected to by a majority of the Board of Executive Clemency.

D. SECTION-BY-SECTION ANALYSIS:

Constitutional amendments do not have sections.

III. FISCAL ANALYSIS & ECONOMIC IMPACT STATEMENT:

A. FISCAL IMPACT ON STATE GOVERNMENT:

1. Revenues:

None.

2. Expenditures:

Article XI, section 5 of the Florida Constitution requires that each proposed amendment to the Constitution be published in a newspaper of general circulation in each county two times prior to the general election. It is estimated that the cost to the Division of Elections would be approximately \$47,000 statewide for each amendment proposed.

B. FISCAL IMPACT ON LOCAL GOVERNMENTS:

1. Revenues:

None.

2. Expenditures:

None.

C. DIRECT ECONOMIC IMPACT ON PRIVATE SECTOR:

To the extent that the constitutional amendment is required to be published in a paper of general circulation, local newspapers will receive a small economic benefit.

D. FISCAL COMMENTS:

None.

IV. CONSEQUENCES OF ARTICLE VII, SECTION 18 OF THE FLORIDA CONSTITUTION:

A. APPLICABILITY OF THE MANDATES PROVISION:

Election laws are exempt from the mandates of Art. VII, s. 18 of the Florida Constitution.

B. REDUCTION OF REVENUE RAISING AUTHORITY:

See response above.

C. REDUCTION OF STATE TAX SHARED WITH COUNTIES AND MUNICIPALITIES:

See response above.

V. COMMENTS:

A. CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUES:

The authority to grant clemency rests exclusively with the Governor [Article IV, section 8, Florida Constitution]. Previous attempts to circumvent this authority through legislative acts have met with objection from the Florida Supreme Court. [See generally, Singleton v. State, 38 Fla. 297 (1896); In re Advisory Opinion of the Governor, 334 So.2d 561 (Fla. 1976); In re Advisory Opinion of the Governor Civil Rights, 306 So.2d 520 (Fla. 1975); and Sullivan v. Askew, 348 So.2d 312 (Fla. 1977),]. The Court's sentiment is best summarized by this statement:

“The people of this state through adoption of Article IV, Section 8, Florida Constitution expressed their will that the power of pardon and restoration of civil rights vest in the executive ... [t]herefore, when the Constitution prescribes the manner of doing an act, the manner prescribed is exclusive ...” (Emphasis added).

In re Advisory Opinion of the Governor Civil Rights at 523. In light of these decisions, a Constitutional amendment is required to grant an additional method allowing the restoration of voting rights.

B. RULE-MAKING AUTHORITY:

None.

STORAGE NAME: h0779s1.er

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PAGE 5

C. OTHER COMMENTS:

None.

VI. AMENDMENTS OR COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE CHANGES:

The House Committee on Election Reform adopted HJR 779 with a “strike everything” amendment. The bill was made a committee substitute. The amendment conforms the House version to that of the Senate by clarifying that the right to register or vote applies to persons convicted of a felony.

VII. SIGNATURES:

COMMITTEE ON ELECTION REFORM:

Prepared by:

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