



**Testimony in Support of LB 75
Nebraskans for Civic Reform
March 1, 2017**

Members of the Government, Military, and Veterans Affairs Committee,

I would like to submit testimony in support of LB 75 in my official capacity as Director of Voting Rights with Nebraskans for Civic Reform, a nonpartisan nonprofit advocacy organization that works to create a more modern and robust democracy. As an organization, Nebraskans for Civic Reform seeks to increase civic engagement and improve the civic health of Nebraska.

Accompanying my testimony is a study created and compiled in collaboration with *The Sentencing Project* that details the impact of current disenfranchisement laws and the impact LB 75 could have on Nebraska. Currently, 17,500 Nebraskans are disenfranchised. LB 75 would expand the franchise to roughly 7,000 Nebraskans. These are Nebraskans that are living in our community, paying taxes, contributing to our neighborhoods, but unable to fully access their democratic institutions. Beyond expanding the franchise to our fellow citizens, LB 75 has the potential to benefit Nebraska by improving public safety, decreasing recidivism, and saving taxpayer dollars.

A 2014 Platte Institute study¹ included analysis to assist lawmakers in determining what policies² could be implemented to save tax dollars by reducing recidivism. While the Platte Institute study did not focus on civic engagement, it does make clear that an investment in programs proven to reduce recidivism should be pursued to reduce expenditures on corrections and ensure public safety. The Legislature has already invested significant funds in programs proving to reduce recidivism including re-entry services like job training, job placement, and education assistance. Increasing civic engagement is the next step for the Legislature.

¹ Levin, Mark and Derek Cohen, "Controlling Costs and Protecting Public Safety in the Cornhusker State", Platte Institute Policy Study, February 2014.

² Programs explored by the Platte Institute included establishing mental health and veterans courts, provisional occupational licenses for ex-offenders, and in-person work programs.



In 2005, when Senator DiAnna Schimek brought LB 53 to automatically restore the right to vote, the bill restored the right when the returning citizen completed their sentence. The two-year waiting period was a political compromise made to advance the bill and serves no political purpose. At the time, Nebraska was leading the country in transitioning from lifetime bans to automatic restoration. In the last decade we have seen other states follow suit and new studies showing that civic engagement can reduce recidivism.

Voting is a pro-social behavior that creates connectedness to one's community and democratic institutions. When we deny the opportunity to vote to returning citizens we marginalize these citizens and further ostracize them from the community we want them to be a part of. By welcoming these returning citizens into our communities with the right to vote upon completion of their sentence, we include these individuals and reduce the likelihood of them reoffending.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify and we respectfully ask the Committee to advance LB 75 to general file.

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