



70 Million S3E2 Annotated Transcript: Voting from Jail Is a Right, and Now a Reality in Chicago

A year ago, Illinois passed a law requiring all jails to ensure that pre-trial detainees have an opportunity to vote. Chicago's Cook County Jail was turned into a polling place during the 2019 primaries. Sheriff Tom Dart is an enthusiastic supporter of the program. And advocates like Amani Sawari are working to ensure voters in custody are informed and prepared to vote in the upcoming election. Pamela Kirkland reports.

Mitzi Miller: 70 million adults in the United States have a criminal record. In Season Three, we'll explore how our rapidly changing reality is impacting those in custody, and the policies that keep them there. I'm Mitzi Miller.

72 people who were detained at the Monroe County Jail in New York, [filed suit against the sheriff and county](#) for being denied access to voting. The detainees first tried to set up a mobile voter registration unit in the jail. But their request was denied. Next they requested to be transported to polling places or to be permitted to vote by absentee mail. That was [denied](#), too.

That all happened in 1972 in a case known as [O'Brien v. Skinner](#). It made it all the way to the Supreme Court. During oral arguments, Justice Thurgood Marshall raised a question about who may be impacted by denying access to eligible voters in jail.

Thurgood Marshall: Is there any reason that the man in jail solely because he can not produce bail...

Miller: An exchange about detainees facing felony charges follows between Justice Marshall and Michael Consedine, who is representing [Monroe County](#).

Michael K. Consedine: That could apply to almost to anybody that registers, but there is a likelihood, a greater likelihood that this particular type of person that may fall in that kind of category.

Marshall: I don't agree with that either, that man is innocent, he is absolutely innocent and the Constitution says he is innocent.

Miller: In 1974 the Court upheld the right to vote for people convicted of misdemeanors and those in pretrial [detention](#) — asserting protection under the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment.

Today, in the lead up to the next general election, many Americans in custody still cannot vote.

According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, of the almost 740,000 people in jail, about two-thirds are awaiting court action on a charge. In other words, nearly 500,000 of them may be [eligible to vote](#).

As the country prepares for a historic election, this segment of the incarcerated population underscores how criminal justice and the franchise intersect.

We went to Chicago to see for ourselves.

A year ago, Illinois passed a law requiring all jails to ensure that pre-trial detainees have an [opportunity to vote](#). In Chicago's Cook County Jail, the nation's [largest single-site jail](#), about 95% of detainees are awaiting trial and the vast majority are [eligible to vote](#). The sheriff there is an enthusiastic supporter of expanding their voting program.

Reporter Pamela Kirkland has the story.

(sound of clapping... "Thanks for voting Mr. Anderson")

Pamela Kirkland: Was this your first time voting?

Talman Anderson: Yes. Yes, it was my first time voting.

Miriam Tello: It was my first time voting too.

Cook County Jail Sergeant:

Three coming at you...

Kirkland: It's a cold, drizzly Chicago day in March. Talman Anderson and Miriam Tello speak to me at the Cook County Jail. It's their first time voting in an election.

And it's the first time the jail will be an official polling location so people in custody can [physically](#) cast a ballot.

- Anderson:* *They say every person's vote counts, so I just went ahead and just voted.*
- Kirkland: Anderson, along with about eighteen hundred people held in Cook County Jail, cast his vote in the jail's chapel, which for the day serves as a makeshift polling place.
- Sergeant:* *Gentlemen, take it up the stairs...*
- Kirkland: Detainees sit in chairs in neat rows along the wall, watching as each person makes their way through a maze of voting equipment and election officials.
- They're asked first if they're registered to vote. Their answer either sends them to a plastic folding table to fill out a voter registration card, or over towards the voting machines to cast their ballot in the Illinois presidential preference primary.
- Anderson: It was a cool experience. If they would have come on the deck and did it, but you wouldn't have gotten off the deck so it was like a breath of fresh air. Got to do a little moving around. So it was alright.
- Kirkland: Miriam Tello cast her vote across the street where the women in custody are held.
- Tello: At first, I was a little nervous--like I was walking up. But all the directions were clear. Like they gave me all the information. When I went to the booth, it was all smooth, all their information was clear to read, too.
- Kirkland: Many of the people I spoke with that day praised their voting experience, including Ioan Lela.
- Ioan Lela: It was smoother than I thought it was going to be. I didn't think they were going to be organized 'cause, nothing's organized here, but it was smooth. They took your name, asked you if you're registered. Since I was registered, I guess it was a little smoother. They found me in a computer and led me to the screen and, you know, everybody was real accommodating and nice. So it was smooth.
- Kirkland: Things ran smoothly inside the Cook County Jail for two weekends in early March, but the journey to bring those voting machines inside was anything but.
- Sheriff Tom Dart: I was enthusiastically in favor of it, supporting it and pushing it from day one.

Kirkland: Ever since Cook County Sheriff Tom Dart took office [in 2006](#), he says he's made expanding voting inside the walls of the jail a top priority. He worked alongside nonprofit Chicago Votes and the Chicago Board of Elections to turn the Cook County Jail into a polling place.

Dart: I thought it was a moral imperative that people who are in custody, particularly none of them have been convicted. Who better to be engaged in their community and their society and you know, fixing their, the ills that may have got them there, identifying the issues in their community there that are lacking that could have made their lives better. I mean I just find the whole notion that people who are involved in the criminal justice system shouldn't vote is repugnant.

Kirkland: In [August of 2019](#), Illinois Governor J.B. Pritzker signed into law legislation making Cook County Jail Chicago's newest polling place.¹ SB2090 was a package of bills to expand access to voting and voter education programs in jails and prisons around [the state](#). Pritzker talked about the jail in his remarks at the bill signing that month.

Gov. J.B. Pritzker: *"[We're going to be putting](#) a polling place in the Cook County Jail for detainees who are eligible to vote and a vote-by-mail program in every county across the state of Illinois, that's 102 counties."*

Kirkland: The law requires county jails and election officials across the state to establish systems giving eligible voters, including pretrial detainees, the opportunity to vote. It also requires counties with more than 3 million residents to establish a temporary polling place within a jail. Cook County is the only Illinois county to meet that [requirement](#).

Before voting booths moved in in the lead up to the March 17 primary, detainees had been able to vote by mailing in an absentee ballot. Eugene McGraw has been awaiting trial in Cook County since 2018 . He says he's been voting in elections since 2008, even while in custody. He described how the voting process used to work in the jail.

Eugene McGraw: We did a vote maybe last year sometime, but it was like, they brought some sheets of paper in and we just signed them and it was like, it was real, it was real depressing.

¹ The legislation is worded in a way that could allow for other jails in the state to set up temporary polling places. However, under section (e) that would require temporary polling places to be established "In a county with a population of 3,000,000 or more, the election authority in the county shall establish a temporary branch polling place under this Section in the county jail. " Cook County is the only county with over 3 million residents: it's the only county that qualified.

Dart: I couldn't have said it any better. There's something about physically being with other human beings in that room, in that environment where there's serious people deciding the direction of their government. And there's an energy there.

Kirkland: This March, 1850 people were able to vote from the Cook County jail polling location, roughly 40% of detainees. Sheriff Dart says it's a sharp increase from past elections.

Dart: We only had 700 people vote in the March 2016 primary, and at that point in time, we probably had about, I'd say about eight, 8-9,000 people in custody.

Kirkland: Even before the results had come in, civil rights organizations touted the Cook County Jail as a potential model for other correctional facilities to expand access to the ballot — demonstrating that not only is it possible to bring a polling place into jail, but showing it can be successful.

In jails across the United States, many of those in custody are actually eligible to vote, but the process of voting can vary from state to state. In Massachusetts, a detainee can request a ballot to be mailed to the jail without having to register first. In Arizona, county officials must submit a plan showing exactly how people in custody will be able [to vote](#). And earlier this year in Alabama, “incarceration” was added to the list of acceptable reasons for requesting an [absentee ballot](#).

Because the registration and ballot process varies based on location, it can create confusion.

Music ends

Amani Sawari: We need to make sure that we're not just, saying, “hooray” when a polling booth is created in the jail, but we need to say, “hooray” when people feel fully equipped to use that polling booth.”

Kirkland: That's Amani Sawari. She's a community organizer in Detroit, Michigan. She's also a spokesperson for the Right 2 Vote campaign for incarcerated citizens and a well known prisoners' rights advocate.

Her company, Sawari Media, produces a newsletter called the Right To Vote Report. It reaches tens of thousands of people, by her count, in jails, prisons and detention facilities in more than 30 states.

Sawari: The prison itself and jails, these facilities have a monopoly on what information is distributed in their facilities. They come up with the rules, they

get to say what channels can be on the TV, what magazines come in. They approve of everything that is distributed amongst their populations. And so what's really important about the Right to Vote report is that we are committed to protecting people's right to be informed.

Kirkland: Voter education options in jail are limited. Back in 2017, Chicago Votes coordinated with the Cook County Sheriff to bring more voter and civic education programs inside the jail.

Before the March primary Sheriff Dart made sure access to public television was available.

Dart: We have a PBS station here in Chicago and they do a service where they let candidates all give like a two minute spiel that can't be denigrating your opponent and just talking about what you do. I had that play because I wanted candidates to have the ability to reach out to detainees and have it done in a neutral way.

Kirkland: In the Cook County jail, it's something many of the detainees talked about, including Kathy Hughes and Ioan Lela.

Kathy Hughes: Only way I knew who was on the ballot is through the television. I think that they don't show enough through the television about the candidates and what they represent or what they stand for.

Lela: We go in there blind a lot of times. We don't know any of the judges. Um, you know, we see some commercials, but we don't know their credentials. So it would be helpful. A lot of brothers actually did mention that they don't know nothing about these candidates, you know. So, it would be helpful to have some type of brochures or pamphlets and some type of information, some type of research that we could get from the law library or from outside sources on these candidates.

Kirkland: That's what Sawari hopes to do with the Right 2 Vote report — put more information into the hands of people in custody.

Sawari: We want to make sure that people know what the newest legislation is that impacts them where it is on a federal level and on a state level, particularly around the area of ending felony disenfranchisement. Our role is to make sure that people are informed about what's going to be on the ballot, and if not, what the best method would be of participating, at least making sure that they know whether or not they can participate.

Kirkland: For the November general election, Sawari is partnering with other groups in an effort to reach overlooked voters in jails.

The effort to contact those jails had just gotten underway when I spoke with Sawari. She said the August edition of the Right 2 Vote report would officially launch the vote by mail in jail campaign.

Efforts to expand access to voting for people in jail and prison are happening across the country. While Sawari's work is nationwide, she's particularly focused on Michigan and issues related to the rights of incarcerated people there.

Sawari: When it comes to the November election, a lot of people are on edge about wanting to see the repeal of Truth in Sentencing on our November ballot.

Music

Kirkland: Michigan's Truth in Sentencing law requires that a person convicted of a crime serve the minimum sentence attached to that crime — [without exception](#). It's one of the issues related to imprisoned people that she's keeping a close eye on.

Among organizations like Sawari's, the focus is mainly on states with harsh [criminal justice policies](#). But also places where officials running jails and prisons just don't know how to facilitate an election for people in custody.

In Texas, for example, activists found the administrators running the Harris County jail, which holds over 10,000 people, didn't know how to let their detainees vote.

End music

Durrel Douglas: That's the size of a town, right? We were shocked to learn how little education was happening inside when it came to voting. And even when it came to staff and like top brass and actually the administrators, like how much work needed to be done to make sure that even they understood kind of what the rules were and what all we needed to do.

Kirkland: Durrel Douglas worked in the Texas Prison System for 5 years. He eventually ascended to the rank of lieutenant. Now, he's the executive director of [Houston Justice](#), a group focused on coordinating voter registration drives [inside the jail](#). In September 2019, they started the push to bring in voting

machines. They were in conversation to make the jail a polling place — just like in Chicago.

Douglas: We sat down, had a knockout drag out meeting with memos from the lawyers and other legalees. We came to an agreement that this was feasible.

Kirkland: The idea was put on hold after the county clerk announced she was resigning. Today, Douglas is working with Amani Sawari to continue pushing for expanding voter access in the Harris County jail and *beyond*.

Douglas: On one hand, we're reaching out to jail administrators, you know, some in some states, it's the warden in some states, it's the, what, it's the, whoever the sheriff, that's the top, top cop at the jail. And we're saying, "Hey, do you guys have a system?" If you do great, we want to help. And in the event that you don't have one and you don't want to do it, we're going to reach directly out to the inmates because in every state there's some kind of workaround.

Kirkland: Douglas decided to focus his outreach on people in custody.

Douglas: Me going to the post office to mail stuff to our jail is the same as me mailing it for jails in Louisiana or Massachusetts or Washington or Illinois. And so we said, "Tell you what: Why don't we start with all the inmates that we communicate with already that are behind bars, but are gonna be behind bars? And how about we start with them as the very first people to sign on, to commit to vote if they're eligible," right? And if we start with them, why not ask them? I'm a community organizer. I understand that it's the grassroots that really makes things grow. Why not have them be organizers in their pods, on their cell blocks where applicable to sign up their quote unquote neighbors? And there, we have a vote by mail in jail.

Music/Break

Kirkland: In 2009, two men who were jailed in DeKalb County, Georgia, Hassan Swann and David Hartfield, filed a federal lawsuit saying they were illegally denied the right to vote in the 2008 presidential election. The DeKalb County Jail had arranged for detainees to request absentee ballots but Swann left the mailing address blank. Swann was never told there was anything wrong with his ballot. He also didn't know a dropbox for ballots had been placed in the lobby of the jail. Because he was jailed in the same county he was a resident, his ballot request was denied and he wasn't able

to vote. The case was eventually thrown out because the court ruled the plaintiffs lacked standing.

Nancy Abudu was one of the lawyers on the Swann case at the time. She's now Deputy Legal Director of Voting Rights at the Southern Poverty Law Center.

End music

Nancy Abudu: Our client, Mr. Swann was very proactive, not only in trying to make sure that he was able to vote by mail, but also encouraging other, his fellow individuals who were incarcerated to also request their ballot.

He tried to get his wife's assistance in terms of delivering his requests and delivering his ballot. That the Sheriff's office didn't provide any accommodation for him to return his ballot, let alone return it on time, including just having a drop box or picking up a drop box on a regular basis. And so, for Mr. Swan and similarly situated individuals, we're talking about essentially no access whatsoever in the exercise of a fundamental right.

Kirkland: Currently, Abudu and the Southern Poverty Law Center are working to identify counties where people in custody are having trouble accessing the ballot. She says expanding access to the ballot in jail is so hard partly due to lack of political will and an institutional unwillingness to provide education so those incarcerated can be informed voters.

Abudu: The constant excuse that we hear from corrections facilities, and this is not just in the voting context, but oftentimes when outside groups are trying to provide any public education to those on the inside, is about safety. And for sure safety is an important consideration and courts have upheld restrictions on access due to safety, but we have not been able to find any credence or reliable evidence to suggest that setting up a polling place in a jail creates a riot.

There's nothing extraordinary, outrageous, or even really revolutionary about what we're proposing as you know, individuals who have felony convictions in Maine and Vermont are able to vote from prison. So we know for sure that this is possible. So when jurisdictions or jails, tell us, give us a whole bunch of excuses about why we can't do it, we point to those states and say, "Yes, you can." Now it's about having the political will to do it and working together so that we're effective.

Foster Bates: *Mr. Bates is probably hanging outside, hang tight...*

Kirkland: Foster Bates has built a very strong network behind the wall. Bates is serving a life sentence at the Maine State Prison.

Bates: Hello?

Kirkland: Hi, Mr. Bates. How are you?

Bates: I'm not too bad. How are you?

Kirkland: He's been in prison for 19 years. He's also served as president of a special NAACP prison chapter for the last 6 years. He spoke with me on the phone from his caseworker's office in a building called 400 G-pod.

He talked about one of his main responsibilities as president — getting other people in the prison registered to vote and distributing information about who and what is on the ballot.

Bates: It's an important voting bloc because if you look at prison society itself, it's a community.

Maine state Prison, I believe in, my opinion is that we have, decided on, quite a few Gubernatorial races in Maine. We've also decided on quite a few state representatives in the state. I believe, people incarcerated, if allowed to vote they can swing an election.

Music

Kirkland: Bates tells me this anecdotally. An MIT study suggests that incarcerated voters are unlikely to [swing an election](#) in any given way. But a recent Marshall Project survey of more than 8,000 people in prisons and jails found that [76 percent](#) of respondents supported restoring voting rights to all incarcerated people.

[Maine and Vermont](#) are the only two states that allow people in prison to vote. [Puerto Rico](#), also. In July, the District of Columbia's City Council voted to approve a measure extending voting rights to residents with felony convictions incarcerated in jail or [prison](#). And in Iowa, Governor Kim Reynolds signed an executive order in August that temporarily reinstates voting rights for some residents who've been convicted of a felony and completed their [sentences](#).

Bates says, the Maine State Prison Branch of the NAACP has registered thousands of voters over the years.

But for Bates, voting is about much more than any single election.

End music

Bates: It allows people to stay engaged and it allows people to not only take some control and responsibility back for their lives. It also allows them to be able to dictate and create laws and statutes that affect our everyday lives.

If you take away the person's right to vote, you know, we, we believe that you take away a part of their humanity...

Kirkland: Eugene McGraw, in the Cook County jail, agrees.

McGraw: It's a real negative vibe here. It's real dark and gloomy. People feel like their lives are already, already turned over to the state and so, they feel like it's really no hope.

Probably a lot of people when they out, they probably just say, "ah, it's just another day," but in here, you know, it makes you feel like your, your voice is heard. Like, you know, your opinion matters.

Music

Kirkland: An ongoing legal battle in Florida could show the impact incarcerated voters may have on elections. In 2018, a majority of Florida voters elected to amend the state's constitution to restore voting rights to people with felony convictions who completed their sentence, excluding murder and sexual offenses. The passage of the amendment meant about [1.4 million](#) people would be eligible to vote.

But partisan politics intervened. The Republican-led legislature passed a law requiring that the prison term is completed AND [all fees and restitution](#) have been paid. Democrats accused Republicans of voter suppression by creating a modern day [poll tax](#). The prolonged legal battle has shown how polarizing voting rights issues have become.

But contrary to assumptions that the formerly incarcerated would lean politically left, a study by the Marshall Project earlier this year showed that granting the right to vote to currently or formerly incarcerated people wouldn't benefit [one political party](#) over another. Foster Bates says he sees evidence of that being true in the Maine State Prison.

Bates: One of the misconceptions is that, you know, the majority of people who are incarcerated are Democrats and independent. And, and I can probably tell you, that's furthest from the truth, particularly at this facility.

So, we can remove that misconception on how people incarcerated vote, I think you will be, people will be more inclined to allow more jails and prisons across the country to vote.

Kirkland: The study also found that the longer a person was in prison, their [motivation](#) to vote increased. In the 2008 election, Bates says the prison chapter of the NAACP registered about 500 people to vote. He thinks 2020 could be even bigger.

Bates: I think this voting cycle is probably one of the most important voting cycles that we had in decades.

ABC News, Tom Llamas:

Now to the Coronavirus pandemic and the staggering loss of life

NBC News, Blayne Alexander:

Tonight, a dire warning from White House coronavirus coordinator, Dr. Deborah Birx. America has entered a new phase of the pandemic.

CNN, Wolf Blitzer: The warning comes as the nation is seeing a 6th straight day of more than 1,000 American lives being lost to the virus.

Kirkland: Then, Covid-19 hit...

Bates: Our education building is shut down for the time being. The library shut down for the time being. So the only activity we have is just basically physical activity, just going outside, walking around on the track.

We're all wearing a mask, every, everybody wear a mask, anywhere we go into a facility, we have to wear a mask except within the area which we live in.

Kirkland: Normally, Bates would gather groups of about 150 people in one room to walk them through the process of registering to vote or re-registering to

vote. He'd also invite representatives into the prison to talk about party platforms and candidates.

Bates: This year, what we're gonna try to do is we're going to try to do it virtual. We're going to try to do what to set up on a Zoom type of format, where we can have the candidates Zoom in, set it up in the multipurpose, chapel area like we, like we've done in the past and have it on a big screen.

Kirkland: Even in the middle of a pandemic, Bates says incarcerated voters are more energized than ever.

Bates: When you have the climate and what you have right now, we have the Coronavirus that is actually destroying the country at this particular point, then when you have a virus that people completely ignore and put their lives in danger to go do a march to support the loss and the, the murder, the murder of George Floyd, I think that's heightened it because the country at this particular point has been sitting on a time bomb. That wick has been lit.

Kirkland: But how do you safely run an in-person election while trying to contain the spread of a deadly virus?

For months, the [Cook County jail](#) was a hotspot for the coronavirus. In fact, just after we spoke with detainees about their voting experiences for this episode, in-person visits were banned from the facility until infection numbers came down.

Stevie Valles: The impact of having polling machines in the jail was felt immediately. And then Wednesday after our first weekend having elections in the jail, the NBA season was canceled. Then everything just started getting shut down.

Kirkland: Stevie Valles is the executive director of Chicago Votes, the nonprofit that worked with Sheriff Dart to get voting machines into the jail in March. For Valles, part of the reason the primary election was so successful was that voting inside the jail meant his group could register voters on the same day. He estimates that of the approximately 1850 voters over those two weekends, about half used same-day voter registration.

Now, they're strategizing how to move forward to November.

Valles: Well, we can't register voters right now inside the jail. We can't go into jail right now because the jail is a hot spot. Is this the right thing for us to be doing right now with all that is happening?

Kirkland: Valles estimates that roughly 80% of Chicago Votes volunteers in the jail are over 50, and therefore are at a higher risk for severe illness or death from Covid-19.

Valles: We're at a place now where a lot of the conversation is pivoting towards the election. It does feel like this is an appropriate time to lean back into this work because, let's face it, voting right now is one of the few direct actions that nobody can stop people from doing. They're looking for some level of empowerment and what has felt like a very helpless year. So, we are now moving in a direction where we're figuring out what, how we would like the elections to look inside the jail come November.

Kirkland: Sheriff Dart is also looking toward november and the safest way to keep voting in the jail.

Dart: It was just beginning to really take hold when this was going on. And just basic things like getting election judges in our poll watchers that was trickier than because of that.

For us to then allow detainees out to go to a poll to vote, I just don't think that's going to be that tricky to do. I mean, we can obviously social distance people away from the actual polling machines and in the line to come and be involved. So I don't think that will be that difficult, but there will be some logistical hurdles that we didn't have before, but I honestly don't see a change in a heck of a lot.

Kirkland: That's a relief for the folks at Chicago Votes.

Valles: If the sheriff is thinking, yeah, we can figure it out to where we can have polling machines in here do say social distancing, no problem. Plus let's have an absentee ballot chase program running at the same time to be in compliance with the law that was just passing Illinois, then me and the sheriff agree.

Women's Jail Guard: You want me to escort them in?

Kirkland: Back on the women's side of the Cook County Jail, Miriam Tello's knowledge of the candidates and the issues on the ballot was facilitated by access to television.

Tello: I go to York Alternative here in Cook County Jail. So we like got to see a lot of videos and debates about the presidential candidates and also the, um,

state's attorney candidates. So I had like a lot of background information on all those candidates.

Kirkland: The primary was Tello's first time voting in any election. She was earning credits toward completing high school while in custody. She watched, candidate debates listened to their platforms, and showed up to the voting booth feeling confident in her choices. She credited her classes for keeping her up-to-date on political candidates.

Tello: Watching the debates. It was also very interesting because many of the candidates had, they had a really good argument.

Music

Kirkland: While prison populations tend to be [older](#), with about half between the ages of 31-41. A 2019 study by the RAND corporation found that Americans are experiencing [higher rates of arrests](#) and convictions by age 26 than previous generations, across all groups. In the Cook County Jail, roughly 64% of people in custody are under 35 years old.

Sheriff Dart said many of the people in custody he spoke with during the March primary were first-time voters.

Stevie Valles with Chicago Votes says that's part of the reason why his group focuses their civic education and engagement programs on people between the ages of 17 and 35. And while they look back at the voting that took place as a major accomplishment, they realize much more work needs to happen.

End music

Valles: Our jail is the only jail that's a polling location in the country, and there's a lot of jails in the country. So, that's a lot of people who are voters who are probably not being given their right to vote or not being offered a ballot.

Turning the Cook County jail into a polling location was the first step in what we plan on being a very long term initiative to unlock civics for people who are in the justice system specifically the incarcerated community.

Kirkland: After what she says was a positive first experience, Miram Tello is anticipating November.

Tello: I'm looking forward to voting again.

Kirkland: Criminal justice advocates have highlighted the need to make voting more accessible from all carceral facilities and have pointed to a resistance to doing so as an infringement on a constitutional right.

Tello: We're definitely not convicted. We're just, it's sad because it says innocent till proven guilty, but technically in here we're guilty until proven innocent. So I think they should have it in all jails because we are all innocent at the moment.

Kirkland: Miriam Tello knows she has every right to vote.

Miller: Pamela Kirkland reported this story.

After Florida voters passed the Voting Restoration Amendment in 2018 to [restore voting rights](#) to people with past felony convictions, two years later an appeals court decision has effectively [stalled access](#) to the voting booth for hundreds of thousands of people.

In early September, an appeals court upheld the state's decision to require people with felony convictions pay court fines and fees before they can register to vote. Julie Ebenstein, senior staff attorney for the American Civil Liberties Union, said in a statement, quote "This ruling runs counter to the foundational principle that Americans do not have to pay to vote" end quote.

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