



## Stories of Those Impacted by Felony Disenfranchisement Laws

### **Linwood Christian, Virginia**

Linwood Christian lives in Petersburg, Virginia where he is actively involved in his community and is a devoted father to his teenage son. He was released from prison in 2002 after serving time for a nonviolent property offense that he committed to support his drug habit.

“My political involvement before jail was moderate,” said Christian. “My incarceration ramped up my activism. Sometimes you can’t appreciate it [your right to vote] until it’s gone. Losing my voting rights really made me appreciate them.”

Today, Christian is managing his sobriety by attending Narcotics Anonymous meetings and working as a case manager for an HIV/AIDS public health program. He is also involved in the community where he serves as president of his son’s Parent-Teacher Association. This fall Christian is working with other community members to organize a candidates’ forum and publish a newsletter on local issues. Candidates for city council and the school board are invited.

### **Beverly DuBois, Washington**

Former park ranger Beverly DuBois lives in rural Washington State. She spent less than a year in the Ferry County Jail for growing and selling marijuana. After leaving prison she was denied the right to vote in the 2004 Presidential election because she owed the state \$1,900 for court costs and fees.

DuBois lost her voting rights as a result of a state law that was changed in 2009. Prior to that reform persons convicted of felonies had to complete all of the terms of their sentence, including payment of any court-ordered fines and costs, before being eligible to vote. In DuBois’s case, she was required to make payments of \$10 a month toward a \$1,610 debt. Due to being disabled in a car accident, DuBois was unable to pay down her debt and the monthly fees caused her financial obligation to increase.

Losing her voting rights encouraged DuBois to become politically involved. “Lobbying for the change in law was educational,” said DuBois “The ACLU asked me to come to Olympia for lobby day and I met with representatives in their offices and it was cool to see the process. I felt like I did something constructive” she said.

### **Eileen Janis, South Dakota**

Eileen Janis grew up on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota where she registered to vote for the first time in 1984 and remained on the voter rolls until early 2008. Due to an error by election officials she mistakenly lost her right to vote after being convicted of a felony offense and sentenced to five years probation, but no jail time.

“I always vote because my mom told me to,” said Janis. “I went [to vote] with my son who had just turned 18. As soon as I tried to vote I was told no because I was a felon” she said.

South Dakota only disenfranchises those sentenced to prison. Janis was removed from the voter rolls without any notice and she was denied the right to vote at her polling place during the 2008 presidential election. The ACLU filed a lawsuit on Janis's behalf in early 2009. The lawsuit was settled earlier this year and clarified confusion over the state’s felony disenfranchisement laws.