

## Ballots Over Bars - Jail Voting Signup Project Fact Sheet (2018)

# Jail Voting Signup Project Fact Sheet

### Background

The [Emancipation Initiative](#) is a community organization founded by Derrick Washington, currently incarcerated in MCI-Norfolk prison. The Emancipation Initiative's two priorities are ending life without parole sentencing and restoring universal voting rights to all currently and formerly incarcerated people. In 2016, currently and formerly incarcerated people and allies formed Ballots Over Bars, a community group dedicated to helping incarcerated people make their voices heard in Massachusetts government.

### The Problem

Across the country and the world, millions of people are prevented from voting due to legal or extralegal discrimination. Massachusetts bars people incarcerated for felony sentences from voting while incarcerated, however people incarcerated for anything other than a felony conviction *are* entitled to vote. Due mainly to a lack of information and funds to pay for postage, **up to 10,000 people who are legally eligible to vote in Massachusetts are prevented from exercising their right to vote each year.**

Incarcerated people who *are* eligible to vote include:

1. Pre-trial: People incarcerated in county jails while awaiting trial. **Note:** Several counties send women who are incarcerated pre-trial to MCI-Framingham women's prison.
2. Misdemeanor convictions: People incarcerated at county houses of correction for misdemeanor convictions. **Note:** People serving time on felony convictions may also be incarcerated at county houses of correction, however they are ineligible to vote; and
3. Civilly committed: People who are incarcerated for civil reasons at the Massachusetts Treatment Center, operated by the Massachusetts Department of Correction.

### Our Solution

In June 2018, Ballots Over Bars launched our first-ever Jail Voting Signup Project, to ensure that the **approximately 10,000 eligible voters who are incarcerated in Massachusetts are able to cast their ballots and make their voices heard in the 2018 primary and general election.**

We are organizing volunteers across the state to: contact their local sheriff, explain that the majority of people incarcerated in county jails are eligible to vote, and offer to bring absentee ballot applications into the jails to help people sign up to vote. Volunteers will then follow up with town clerks to ensure that absentee ballot applications are received and handled appropriately, and assist voters in filling out the absentee ballots, once received.

We are currently looking for volunteers in: **Barnstable, Berkshire, Bristol, Hampshire, Plymouth, and Worcester counties.**

**For more information, e-mail [BallotsOverBars@gmail.com](mailto:BallotsOverBars@gmail.com)**