

# The Star-Ledger

**Those on parole or probation in N.J. are not allowed to vote. That could change soon.**

By Blake Nelson

NJ Advance Media for NJ.com and The Star-Ledger

Published Nov. 25, 2019

A bill that would allow New Jersey residents on probation or parole to vote passed Monday in a largely party-line vote in the Democratic-controlled state Assembly.

Advocates said the change would help about 80,000 people re-integrate into society. Since black residents were incarcerated at a higher rate than whites, Democratic state lawmakers argued that extending voting would help fix flaws in the criminal justice system.

“No one population should be disproportionately denied their right to vote,” Assemblywoman Cleopatra Tucker, D-Essex and, one of the bill’s sponsors said in a statement.

Another sponsor, Assemblywoman Shavonda Sumter, D-Passaic, said voting should be considered a right, not a privilege.

Opponents, including Assemblyman Jay Webber, R-Morris, argued that the bill would let the “inmates run the asylum.” People convicted of a crime should not have a say in how the state runs, he said, especially because they were still under state supervision.

People in prison would still be barred from voting, although some lawmakers want to change that too.

Republican lawmakers also blasted that possibility.

“It would result in politicians catering to the needs of criminals over those of law-abiding citizens,” Assemblyman Greg McGuckin, R-Ocean, said in a statement earlier this month.

The bill (A5823) passed 46-23, with one lawmaker abstaining. The proposal needs to also pass the state Senate before Gov. Phil Murphy, a Democrat, decides whether to sign it into law.

A spokesman for state Senate President Stephen Sweeney, D-Gloucester, said the lawmaker supported the bill, although he did not immediately respond to a question about whether the bill could pass the state Senate.

A fiscal report estimated that more than 64,000 people were currently on probation and more than 15,000 on parole

Legislative researchers concluded that printing more voting cards and mail-in ballots would cost the state more money, but they did not know how much. If everyone currently on probation or parole were sent sample and mail-in ballots, that could cost more than \$233,000.