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Bill sent to governor would give the right to vote to people on parole or probation

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The state Senate approved a bill Monday to allow people on parole or probation in New Jersey to vote, which could affect tens of thousands of residents.

The proposal (A5823) passed the Senate 23-17 at the Statehouse in Trenton, after the state Assembly green lit the same measure last month. It now heads to Gov. Phil Murphy's desk.

Murphy has not promised to sign it, but he has expressed support for the proposal in general, according to a statement from a spokeswoman.

"Governor Murphy believes that increasing access to the ballot so that more people can exercise their right to vote is critical for our state and democracy," the spokeswoman said.

The bill would affect about 80,000 people.

There was no debate in the Senate, where the measure was one of several controversial bills debated by lawmakers on one of the last days of the legislative session.

Proponents have cast the measure as part of the civil rights movement, saying that people who have been released from prison deserve a say in how their state is run. Opponents argue that convicts will dilute the votes cast by people who have never been convicted of a crime, and that losing the right to vote is a just punishment.

People in prison would still be barred from voting, although some lawmakers hope to eventually join two other states that allow those behind bars to cast ballots.

A similar law took effect in Louisiana earlier this year, although that state has not seen a significant increase in voter registration.