

Felon Restoration FAQs

What was the *Falls v. Goins* case about?

In 2020, an individual convicted in Virginia who had moved to Tennessee challenged the process for restoring voting rights for felons who were convicted in another state after his application was denied. The chancery court, Tennessee Court of Appeals, and Tennessee Supreme Court all held that the Coordinator of Elections had followed the correct procedure in denying the application.

How can someone convicted of a felony have their voting rights restored?

Regaining the right to vote after a felony conviction is a two-step process. First, an individual must receive a pardon or have their full rights of citizenship restored. Second, the individual must meet requirements related to paying restitution and court costs, if any, and be current on any child support obligations, if any.

A pardon or restoration of full rights of citizenship is required for all restorations. An individual remains eligible to have their rights restored upon completion of their sentence and any period of supervision, however, they must receive a pardon or have their full rights of citizenship restored before submitting the certificate of restoration.

How does someone get their full rights of citizenship restored?

Under Tennessee law, full rights of citizenship can be restored by petition to the circuit court.

Prior to *Falls v. Goins*, how could someone get their voting rights restored?

In addition to the methods above, an individual could submit a certificate of restoration without a pardon or court order restoring the full rights of citizenship.

Why is the felon voting rights restoration process being modified?

The process is based on the Tennessee Supreme Court's decision in *Falls v. Goins*. The Court's analysis only lays out a two-step process. The Coordinator of Elections did due diligence to review the ruling and related statutes before issuing thorough guidance.

Falls v. Goins is about someone convicted in another state. Why is the process changing for anyone seeking restoration of voting rights?

The law uses very similar language to describe the process for those convicted in another state and those convicted in a Tennessee court or federal court. The analysis in *Falls v. Goins* requires the same interpretation regardless of where someone was convicted. No matter where someone was convicted, a pardon or restoration of the full rights of citizenship is required as the first step of the process.

How does this change impact voters who had their rights restored without a pardon or court order?

All voters who have had their rights restored remain eligible to vote.

What kind of outreach is being done to make affected individuals aware of the change?

The Division of Elections has updated its website, conducted training with county election officials, and provided the updated forms to the Department of Correction and Board of Parole.