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FACT SHEET

INCREASE CIVIC PARTICIPATION

HAVING A STAKE IN GOVERNMENT AND CIVIC LIFE LEADS TO RESPONSIBLE LIVING AND SOCIAL CONTRIBUTION

THOSE WHO HAVE SERVED TIME AND ARE ELIGIBLE TO VOTE FAIL TO DO SO DUE TO APPREHENSION, FEAR, AND MISINFORMATION.

In 1997, then-Governor George Bush signed a state bill authored by current House Juvenile Justice and Family Issues Chairman Harold Dutton that restored voter eligibility to offenders immediately upon the completion of their sentence. Despite this act, those who have served their time are often unaware of their eligibility and may be deterred from voting out of fear that violating voting regulations could land them back in prison – as has happened in other states. For instance, an Arizona man is currently facing 5 years in prison for voting in the 2004 elections; he was unaware that being on probation in his state disqualified him from voter eligibility. In Texas, many individuals do not want to risk returning to prison and therefore don't vote at all.

Ex-offenders may also fail to vote due to an indifference to civic life, which results largely from systemic social exclusion. Individuals who are labeled as criminals, sequestered from society, and deprived of civil liberties are sent a message that they are not supposed to be a part of government and civil society. This can lead to them blaming the government or society for their misfortunes instead of taking responsibility for their actions.

HB 770 BY CHAIRMAN HAROLD DUTTON WOULD ENCOURAGE THOSE WHO HAVE SERVED THEIR TIME TO TAKE PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY AND PARTICIPATE IN CIVIC LIFE.

HB 770 would require the Texas Department of Criminal Justice to distribute to each inmate, parolee, or probationer upon discharge the following documents: (1) written notice that the person may be eligible to vote, and (2) an official voter registration application form.

VOTING CAN HELP EX-OFFENDERS LIVE RESPONSIBLY THROUGH CIVIC PARTICIPATION.

Nearly 1 in 20 Texans has been under some form of supervision at some point in their lives. Ensuring that individuals who are returning to the community are able and willing to participate in civic life can point them in the right direction: they will be able to take on the responsibilities of fully-informed citizens and become more likely to work for the greater good. They will be able to vote on policies that will help them become and stay law-abiding, productive citizens. Finally, having a stake in civic life will encourage them to avoid returning to crime (and prison), creating an incentive for responsible living.

**PLEASE SUPPORT HB 770 BY CHAIRMAN DUTTON
AND ENCOURAGE RESPONSIBLE LIVING**