

IOWA-NEBRASKA NAACP STATE AREA CONFERENCE OF BRANCHES

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
1620 Pleasant Street, Suite 210, Des Moines, IA 50314
515.288.7171 | IowaNebraskaNAACP.org
Betty C. Andrews, President

MOVING POWERFULLY FORWARD! →

August 10, 2020

The Honorable Paul Pate
Iowa Secretary of State
Iowa Capitol, 1007 E. Grand, Ste. 105
Des Moines, IA 50319

Dear Secretary Pate,

On behalf of the Iowa-Nebraska NAACP State Area Conference, I write to call on you to make immediate changes to the Secretary of State's website, *State of Iowa Official Voter Registration Form*, and *Voter Ready Toolkit* to clarify that people with a felony record are now eligible to register and vote and to educate new voters with clear timely information. The NAACP further calls on the Secretary of State's office and Iowa County Auditors to mail *Request for Absentee Ballots* to voters who register after their initial mailings.

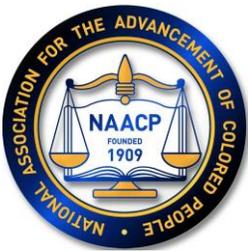
Certain information currently being provided online by the Secretary of State's Office has become obsolete as a result of Executive Order Number 7 on Restoration of Citizenship that was signed by Governor Kim Reynolds on August 5, 2020.

- The registration section of the Secretary of State's website currently links to *the Restoration of Citizenship Rights* page (<https://sos.iowa.gov/elections/voterinformation/restorerights.html>) that states, "In Iowa, a person's voter registration is cancelled if the person is convicted of a felony. Voting rights may be restored by application to the Governor's Office."

The language on the site must be changed to reflect that, with the issuing of the Executive Order, the Governor has restored the right to vote of all persons with a felony conviction with the exception of those crimes listed in the homicide section of Iowa Code. An Application for Restoration of Voting Rights is no longer required after a person has been discharged of his or her sentence.

- The *State of Iowa Official Voter Registration Form* (<https://sos.iowa.gov/elections/pdf/voteapp.pdf>) has an opening paragraph reading, "In Iowa, you are not qualified to vote if you have been convicted of a felony and have not received a restoration of voting rights. You may apply to the Governor to restore your voting rights." These sentences are now totally inaccurate and is vitally important to delete those sentences as soon as possible.

Further, because a felony conviction has served as a bar to one's voting rights for nearly a decade, it is vitally important for the web site to state explicitly that (1) the Governor has restored the right to vote of all persons with a felony conviction upon completion of their term of confinement, parole, probation, or other supervised release, except for a small number of people convicted of a homicide or serious sex offense, and (2) that the Governor has restored their right to register to vote and to vote even though they have not paid and will still owe fines, costs, restitution, or other monetary obligations resulting from a criminal conviction



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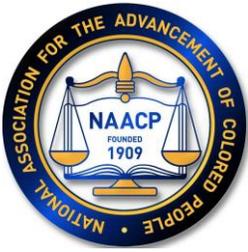
The reason it is important is that persons who are now eligible to vote still must complete the Voter Registration form and submit it to their county auditor or must complete the online registration. That Voter Registration form requires those attempting to register to sign an affidavit swearing and affirming under penalty of perjury that all the qualifying requirements have been met. The form also cautions: “WARNING If you sign this form and you know the information is not true, you may be convicted of perjury and fined up to \$7,500 and/or jailed for up to 5 years.” The Voter Registration form needs to be explicit and clear what those “qualifying requirements” are because, in the absence of such clarity, that warning may intimidate persons newly eligible to vote from registering to vote.

The NAACP also recommends that the form add a link to the Find your County Auditor section of the Secretary of State’s website so people submitting the voter registration form to their County Auditor can more easily find their County Auditor’s mailing address.

In addition, the NAACP also calls you to make the following changes to ensure the process is welcoming and gives enough lead time for all, particularly the over 40,000 potential new voters resulting from the signing of Executive Order Number 7:

- Publish the date that your office will be mailing absentee ballot requests (requests to vote by mail) to voters. On July 17, 2020 the Legislative Council granted you permission to mail absentee ballots to all Iowa voters due to COVID-19 health concerns.
 - The NAACP further requests that each of Iowa’s 99 County Auditors, mail absentee ballot request forms to new registrants until October 24, 2020, which is the last day to request them. These steps will ensure that all active and newly registered voters have the same opportunity to vote by absentee ballot as those voters previously registered, an option viewed by many as safer during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Update the Secretary of State’s Voter Ready Toolkit (<https://voterready.iowa.gov/>.) As of August 5, this toolkit, which is supposed to educate voters, is out of date. It still has dates and information that only apply to the June Primary Election. With so many potential new voters, revising this educational tool now will allow voters to become acclimated with the voting process as soon as possible and prepare them to vote in the General Election on Tuesday, November 3, 2020

Declutter and/or build a new electronic voter registration form (<https://mymvd.iowadot.gov/Account/Login?ReturnUrl=%2fVoterRegistration>.) The current form utilizes a link from the Department of Transportation, not the Secretary of State’s Office. The form is cluttered with incongruous DOT notices and, the voter registration form is not visible when you land on the site. Only if a person scrolls down several times can one find the voter registration form. If this form can only be updated by the DOT, the NAACP recommends the Secretary of State’s office build a new form dedicated solely to registering new voters and have it operational by August 15 as time is of the essence.



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The NAACP has been receiving a number of inquiries from people with felony records asking how they can register to vote. We are reluctant to direct them to the Secretary of State's website because it is inaccurate and may cause confusion. Every day that there is a delay in updating these critical materials poses a risk to eligible citizens' opportunity to vote in upcoming elections.

The NAACP is aware of reports that in some states individuals whose rights have been restored by Executive Order or Constitutional Amendment have been hesitant or reluctant to register to vote, and to vote, because they were wary of having contact with governmental authorities or fearful of being challenged. It is essential to correct these documents as soon as possible so that people affected by this historic Order are informed of their right to register and to vote and are not misled into refraining from registering and from voting.

The NAACP emphasizes how important it is that the Secretary of State and voting registrars all across Iowa welcome this group of new voters and facilitate their registration and voting by providing clear instructions and accurate information. The Governor by her own words "welcomed back as full members of society" those who have completed their terms of confinement, probation, and parole;" and she said that "necessarily includes reintegration into our political process." We urge you to take prompt action to start that process immediately.

We thank you in advance for giving this issue the utmost priority. Please let us know if we can be of assistance in your process.

Sincerely,

Betty C. Andrews

Sincerely,

Betty Andrews, President

Iowa-Nebraska NAACP Conference of Branches

Russell Lovell & David Walker, Co-Chairs

Iowa-Nebraska and Des Moines Branch of the NAACP