

SENATE STAFF ANALYSIS AND ECONOMIC IMPACT STATEMENT

(This document is based on the provisions contained in the legislation as of the latest date listed below.)

Prepared By: Criminal Justice Committee

BILL: CS/SB 514

SPONSOR: Criminal Justice Committee and Senators Wilson, Lawson, and others

SUBJECT: Civil Rights Restoration/Prisoners

DATE: April 13, 2005

REVISED: _____

	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
1.	Clodfelter/Davis	Cannon	CJ	Fav/CS
2.	_____	_____	CA	_____
3.	_____	_____	JU	_____
4.	_____	_____	_____	_____
5.	_____	_____	_____	_____
6.	_____	_____	_____	_____

I. Summary:

This committee substitute establishes the procedure for prisoners in county detention facilities to seek the restoration of their civil rights. It will become the responsibility of the administrator of the county detention facility to provide the prisoner with an application form produced by the Parole Commission at least two weeks before the prisoner's discharge. The administrator of the county detention facility may use volunteers to assist the prisoners with their applications.

This bill creates a new section of the Florida Statutes.

II. Present Situation:

The civil rights of a convicted felon are suspended until restored by pardon or restoration of civil rights. Restoration of civil rights is a form of executive clemency – a power granted by the Florida Constitution to the Governor with the consent of at least two members of the Cabinet. Art. IV, s. 8(a), Fla. Const. Convicted felons are eligible for restoration of civil rights (except the right to own, possess, or use firearms) without a hearing upon completion of sentence or supervision if they meet certain criteria set forth in the Rules of the Clemency Board. If not eligible for restoration of civil rights without a hearing, the felon may apply for a hearing to determine whether his or her civil rights will be restored. In certain cases, convicted felons must request a waiver of clemency rules to be eligible for consideration.

The Florida Parole Commission acts as the agent of the Clemency Board in determining whether offenders and inmates are eligible for restoration of rights without a hearing, investigating applications and conducting hearings when required, and making recommendations to the Board. The Department of Corrections' participation in the process is required by the following two statutes:

- s. 940.061, F.S., requires the department to inform and educate inmates and offenders on community supervision about the restoration of civil rights and to assist eligible inmates and offenders on community supervision with completion of the application for restoration of civil rights.
- s. 944.293, F.S., requires the department to assist offenders under supervision in completing the application and necessary forms and to ensure that the application and other necessary information is forwarded to the Governor before the offender is released from supervision.

The Rules of Executive Clemency were changed during the past year to eliminate the application form. A person seeking restoration of civil rights can initiate the process by applying online, by telephone, in person, or in writing.

In recent years, the department and the Parole Commission have reportedly coordinated efforts in order to make restoration of civil rights less difficult for incarcerated felons who will be eligible for restoration without a hearing upon release. The department provides the commission with a computerized list of all eligible inmates who are being released from prison, making it unnecessary for the inmate to take any affirmative action to have his or her civil rights restored.

There is no statutory requirement for county jails to provide county jail prisoners with education or assistance regarding civil rights restoration. Any education or assistance that is currently provided is initiated locally.

III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

This committee substitute would place the responsibility for initiating the process of restoring civil rights on the administrators of county detention facilities. If possible, within two weeks of a prisoner being released from a county detention facility, the administrator is responsible for providing the prisoner with an application for restoration form from the Parole Commission. It would then be the prisoner's responsibility to fill out the form.

The bill provides that the administrator of the county detention facility may allow visitors to help the prisoners complete their application.

The proposed legislation does not apply to prisoners who are released to the custody of the Department of Corrections. Those prisoners are exempted from this legislation because their restoration of civil rights process would be covered by the Department of Corrections as discussed above. Also, by implication this bill would only apply to those inmates who have in fact lost their civil rights by reason of commission of a felony.

IV. Constitutional Issues:

A. Municipality/County Mandates Restrictions:

None.

B. Public Records/Open Meetings Issues:

None.

C. Trust Funds Restrictions:

None.

V. Economic Impact and Fiscal Note:

A. Tax/Fee Issues:

None.

B. Private Sector Impact:

None.

C. Government Sector Impact:

There will be some costs to the counties in implementing the provisions of the bill but the specific amount is not determinable. However, the impact will be dependent upon the number of eligible prisoners in a particular county. According to data supplied by the Department of Corrections, it is estimated that approximately 43,000 felons were sentenced to county detention facilities between July 1, 2003, and June 30, 2004.

VI. Technical Deficiencies:

None.

VII. Related Issues:

In 2004, the First District Court of Appeal issued a decision which held that the Department of Corrections must provide the appropriate restoration process forms to offenders prior to their discharge from prison. The court also construed the statutes to require the department to offer assistance in completing the forms and give assistance to prisoners when further help was requested prior to the prisoners' discharge. *Florida Caucus of Black State Legislators, Inc. v. Crosby*, 877 So. 2d 861 (Fla. 1st DCA 2004)

VIII. Summary of Amendments:

None.

This Senate staff analysis does not reflect the intent or official position of the bill's sponsor or the Florida Senate.
