

As a person convicted of a felony in the United States, I feel like an alien in my own home. Millions of citizens with criminal records realize how detrimental it is to not be included in our country's decisions. We all have a hand in changing the nation, or at least should. But once our civil rights have been stripped from us, we cannot vote, hold office, become a notary, and serve on jury duty. Not only does a criminal record prevent us from actually taking part in what it is to be an American and have a voice, but we can't serve in some armed forces, we can't get government jobs, we can't hold arms, and worst of all, we are stereotyped wherever that information is released.

Making an honest living actually becomes close to impossible. Once released out of incarceration, most of us are put on probation or parole. This "trap" gives authorities the right to invade our privacy, whether it is showing up to our jobs or homes. Most ex-cons barely make it through this first stage. If they are lucky enough to accomplish this feat, the person then faces society. This involves getting into the job market and being around other law abiding citizens. When trying to get a job, three things come into play: honesty, personality, and past work history. Honesty is deciding whether or not to lie on your application about the conviction to better the chances of getting the job. Personality is after you've divulged the record; you have to impress the boss with a positive personality. Lastly, if you have a bad work record of constantly being late or being fired, you can forget about the job. Now, the job is almost a requirement to the terms of probation. So if you can't get a job, it's back to jail.

I'm in no way saying that having a record is a good thing, because it's absolutely not. But I am saying that as humans we all make mistakes. We've paid our debt to society with jail time, probation, community service, and restitution/fines. It's time to allow us to live in society as free Americans. If it were easier for us to gain employment, and be accepted, there would be a guaranteed decrease in crime. As ex-cons, we know how difficult it is to restore our rights and be able to vote. We need to be taught and walked through the steps of how to regain these rights. If not, the population of actual "Americans" will continue to decrease.

-Anonymous Voice