

from the **Orlando Sentinel Friday August 12, 2011**

Felons' rights

Regular readers of these pages might recall a guest column last week by an ex-offender. Desmond Meade passionately argued for Florida to end the fundamentally un-American practice of denying basic civil rights to those who have paid their debt to society.

We must add our voice to that of Meade. So should you. So should every fair-minded person in Florida, whose elected leaders earlier this year voted to make it even more difficult for ex-felons — ex, mind you — to regain their rights.

It's hard not to just splutter at the thought of men and women who have completed every element of their sentences for nonviolent crimes and are now made to wait a minimum of five years before they can vote. No exceptions. Others have to wait a minimum of seven years. Only a couple of other states retain this archaic practice, which supporters like Attorney General Pam Bondi seems to view as a form of penance.

The vote by the Florida Cabinet rolled back reforms by former governors Jeb Bush — hardly a softy on crime — and Charlie Crist.

But what's this? A recent state Parole Commission report that shows offenders who had their rights restored under the old process were far less likely to go back to jail. In other words, people who felt they were once again part of society were less likely to return to a life of crime.

Armed with this new information, the Cabinet needs to rethink this unfair and risky move to keep ex-felons on society's fringes.

[Click here to view this article](#)

Our take on: Felons' rights