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Posted on Wed, Apr. 13, 2005

## COURTS

# Appeals upholds voting-rights ban; Supreme Court could be next stop

**A federal appeals court upheld the state law that strips voting rights from convicted felons for the rest of their lives. An attorney says the case is headed to the U.S. Supreme Court.**

**BY LISA ORKIN EMMANUEL**  
Associated Press

A full federal appeals court Tuesday upheld a 160-year-old Florida law that enforces a lifetime ban on voting rights for convicted felons, even after they have served their prison time and been released into society.

The ruling stems from Johnson vs. Bush, a lawsuit brought to Miami federal court in September 2000. Ex-felons sued to regain their voting rights when their sentences are finished, instead of having to apply through a complex system for civil rights restoration, which many never do, or never complete.

The 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Atlanta did not give a voting tally, but of 12 judges who heard the case, there was but one full written dissent and one partial dissent. One judge wrote for the majority, and two signed an "especially concurring" opinion.

Jessie Allen, lead attorney for the ex-offenders, said the case will be taken to the U.S. Supreme Court. Activists also hope for action in the Florida Legislature.

"I am confident that one way or another it will change," said Allen, associate council at the Brennan Center for Justice at New York University.

Allen argued that the law was a violation of the U.S. Voting Rights Act, was antidemocratic and disproportionately disenfranchised blacks.

She said one in five black men in Florida are affected by the law.

A total of 600,000 people in Florida are banned; 167,000 are blacks, she said.

The court noted that Florida first adopted its ban on felon voting in 1845, basing it on a "nonracial rationale" since blacks were not allowed to vote at the time.

Forty-six states and the District of Columbia have disenfranchisement laws depriving inmates of the right to vote to some extent.

In 14 states, ex-offenders who have fully served their sentences can, as in Florida, be disenfranchised for life.