Political Caucus | Should Washington prohibit felons behind bars from voting?

Posted by Lynne Varner

The Seattle Times Political Caucus is a group of Times readers who have signed up to engage on issues important to government at the local, state and federal level.

The 9th Circuit Court of Appeals will hear on Sept. 21 a challenge to Washington's longstanding ban on voting by felons in prison or under community supervision. A three-judge panel previously ruled the state's ban violated the federal Voting Rights Act.

For 120 years, Washington has prohibited voting by incarcerated felons. By varying degrees, 48 states do the same. Here's a state-by-state breakdown.

Lawyers challenging the law argue that because Washington's prison system is disproportionately minority-black, Latinos and Native Americans are 12 percent of the state's population but account for 36 percent of prison inmates - the ban violates civil rights protections.

A Times editorial earlier this year outlined what is at stake. This is a fascinating case with national significance. Appeals courts in three other circuits - the first, second and 11th - reached conclusions opposite of the 9th Circuit. The issue is likely headed to the U.S. Supreme Court, according to this analysis.

What do you think? Is the felon voting ban an appropriate sanction or a civil rights violation?
Malware attacks are a growing problem on all Web sites. Read more about what to do if you see something suspicious.