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## Ohio law firm registers juvenile delinquent voters

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A law firm is reaching out to what it sees as a forgotten demographic this election season.

The nonprofit, nonpartisan Ohio Justice and Policy Center is conducting a voter registration drive inside the state's juvenile correction centers.

The group began the effort Thursday and hopes to register about 400 people by Monday's deadline so they can vote by absentee ballot.

Unlike imprisoned felons, who can't vote in Ohio, people in juvenile facilities are not considered to have been convicted of a crime. They are eligible to vote, provided they are 18 years old on Election Day.

It's the first time an outside organization has conducted a registration drive in Ohio's juvenile system, said David Singleton, executive director of the Policy Center.

About one-third of the 1,426 people in the facilities statewide are 18 or older, said Andrea Kruse, a spokeswoman for the Department of Youth Services. Some juvenile delinquents remain there until they turn 21.

Law firm representatives planned to visit seven of the eight state-run facilities to register voters and educate them about requesting an absentee ballot by mail. The Cuyahoga Hills Juvenile Correction Facility near Cleveland already had sponsored its own voter registration effort.

The voters will register according to the counties in which they are incarcerated, not necessarily their home counties, Singleton said.

"The larger point is it's teaching them that you do have a voice," he said, adding that he thinks civic engagement is the best way to help them reintegrate into society.

Eli Braun, a staff member with the Policy Center, said residents at the all-male Ohio River Valley Juvenile Correction Facility near Portsmouth seemed eager to register Friday afternoon.

"I've never seen anybody so excited to fill out forms," he said from a classroom where people were registering and chatting about which presidential candidates they favored. Braun expected to register about 70 people.

"I asked them if they understood the purpose of voting," he said. "One of them immediately said, 'To make our voices heard.'" Braun said he hopes the registration spurs them to be longtime voters.

Voting rights advocates around the U.S. have been pushing to register as many people as possible within the criminal justice system, but this may be the only example that focuses on juveniles, said Alec Ewald, an assistant political science professor who researches criminal disenfranchisement law at the University of Vermont.

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