



**PRESS RELEASE**  
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**Tennessee Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights  
Releases Report on Voting Rights**  
*Report Analyzes Effects of Covid-19 and 2020 Uprisings on Voting in the State*

On July 15, 2024, the Tennessee Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights (Committee) issued a [report](#) on voting rights in the state. The report was issued after a series of public hearings where the Committee heard from individuals, organizations, and professionals with specific knowledge of, and experience with, the conditions surrounding voting rights and the unique challenges faced in 2020.

Through this investigation, the Committee explored the topic of voting rights through two main themes: the civil rights effects on voting after the passage of Senate Bill 8005 and access to voting during the Covid-19 pandemic. The two inquiries are linked by their real and perceived impact on the legitimacy of the political process within the state of Tennessee. The report includes findings and actionable recommendations directed to both the Commission and key stakeholders in Tennessee. These recommendations are intended to promote research and enhance understanding of key themes as well as improve policies and procedures in the area of voting rights.

The Committee's study of Senate Bill 8005 resulted in several key findings. Senate Bill 8005, signed into law in August 2020, imposes criminal penalties on certain acts related to protesting. With criminal penalties resulting in those convicted under this law losing their right to vote, the Committee sought to understand whether this measure has the effect of unjustifiably disenfranchising one or more protected classes of people. The Committee's findings on this theme noted, for example, that:

- certain aspects of the criminal law related to protesting within Senate Bill 8005 were already covered by existing laws;
- the legislative process leading up to passage of the law included a shorter-than-usual timeline in which the legislation was passed;
- the law caused a chilling effect that was observed immediately after its passage;
- there was an alleged disparate treatment of protesters at racial justice-related protests, including those focused on this law, as compared to other types of protests;
- and it is unclear how discretion may be used when the law is being enforced.

*The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights is an independent, bipartisan agency charged with advising the President and Congress on civil rights matters and issuing an annual federal civil rights enforcement report. The Commission, by Congressional mandate, establishes Advisory Committees in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and the U.S. Territories. For information about the Commission and our Advisory Committees, please visit [www.usccr.gov](http://www.usccr.gov) and follow us on Twitter and Facebook.*

Secondly, the Committee examined the impact of voting restrictions (both recent and long-established) on citizens during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Committee considered whether voting restrictions applied during the COVID-19 pandemic exerted a disparate impact on the protected classes and the Committee's findings include, for example:

- Tennessee represents one of the most restrictive states in access to voting nationwide and places additional obstacles on certain voting-aged residents that impact registration and turnout, especially individuals convicted of felonies;
- Testimony from county leaders who shared their experiences on how they navigated voting operations at the height of the pandemic and the disparate outcomes for voters in communities of color.

Committee Chair Shaka Mitchell stated, "This report reflects the nuanced challenges our state and the country have faced in recent years in terms of ensuring full access to civic participation despite unprecedented public health emergencies and restoring confidence in public institutions amidst emerging social issues. I believe that our Committee's recommendations encourage a forward-looking path that considers the lessons learned from 2020 and strengthens equitable access to our democratic institutions."

Vice Chair Yesha Yadav stated, "This report is the outcome of an ambitious collective effort on behalf of our bipartisan Committee and would not have been possible without the participation of a variety of subject matter experts who shared their testimony with us. I also want to thank the members of the public who attended our meetings. Our goal is that this report becomes part of a larger discourse on political and civic engagement in Tennessee."

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