How Your Vote Matters

DISTRICT ATTORNEY
As you can see reading Brandon’s story (inside), the DA decides which criminal cases to prosecute and guides sentencing. The DA reviews complaints against police officers and decides whether or not to prosecute them.

SHERIFF
The sheriff runs the county jails, and is also in charge of enforcing the law throughout the county, just like a chief of police. Deputies arrest and detain suspects and patrol the county.

CITY COUNCIL
Your representative makes important decisions about the future of your neighborhood, including how to spend local tax dollars. They distribute funds for road repair, parks, and development, and oversee police.

SCHOOL BOARD
School board members hire/fire the superintendent (who sets overall district policies, including disciplinary rules), set the budget, approve contracts for teachers, and decide where to open or close schools.

GOVERNOR
Your governor signs bills into law (and can veto bills as well). They make important appointments to state agencies, including the state’s school superintendent, and can grant commutations and pardons to prisoners.

U.S. CONGRESS/SENATE
Members of Congress and the Senate write laws—any of which can have a profound impact on you. Your representatives can help if you’re experiencing a problem with a federal agency, like the IRS, Social Security, or veterans issues.

JUDGES
Judges have enormous authority over our lives by interpreting the law, deciding what evidence is heard in a case, and deciding how long to sentence someone convicted of a crime.

PRESIDENT
The president is Commander in Chief of the armed forces and plays a huge role in shaping responses to international crises. They symbolize the goals and beliefs of the country and makes sure the government does its job.

LOCAL & STATE INITIATIVES AND BONDS
As seen in Brandon’s story (inside), initiatives can have a dramatic impact on our lives. Citizens or the state legislature can put a measure on the ballot for the people to vote on. If they’re passed, they become law. They can change the tax system and the criminal justice system, including upholding or ending the death penalty or sentencing guidelines. Bonds ask voters to decide how public money will be spent and can have a positive or negative effect on your community.

A guide to voting for people with a criminal conviction

preparing by the ACLU of California Voting Rights Project

LET ME VOTE Campaign

ACLU of California Voting Rights Project
votingrights@acluca.org  letmevoteca.org  619.232.2121
Brandon Duncan is a father, uncle, son, grandson, friend, activist and renowned rapper from Southeast San Diego. Performing as Tiny Doo, Duncan has made a name for himself as an artist who portrays the realities of being poor and black in America.

In the summer of 2014, Duncan was arrested and thrown in jail. Using a gang conspiracy penal code (P.C. 182.5) that no other DA has used, San Diego’s District Attorney Bonnie Dumanis charged Duncan and 33 other black men with a series of shootings that prosecutors admit the men were not actually involved in.

Under P.C. 182.5, these men were held responsible for crimes they did not commit because the DA argued they “benefited” from the criminal activity. In Duncan’s case, she said the “benefit” was praise for his latest free mixtape, No Safety.

The community reacted strongly in support of the 34 men, questioning how such a blatantly unjust law existed. The answer: in 2000, Californians voted for Proposition 21, a ballot initiative that created new gang conspiracy laws—including P.C. 182.5. Most voters likely had no idea the drastic effects that this obscure provision could have.

Duncan was devastated when he learned that he was jailed because people voted the harsh penal code into law. “That means because my own community did not vote and did not counter the “throw-them-all-in-jail” voters, I was charged with this insane law,” said Duncan.

After seven long months in jail, Duncan’s charges were dropped. After his release, Duncan committed himself to advocating for community unity and participation in elections. “I’m fighting for our voting rights because I never want something this horrible to happen to any of my sons. We have to realize the decision we make today to not vote could literally destroy the next generation of young men of color.”