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**South Florida
Sun-Sentinel**

Clemency, new law will assist felons in new life

By Reginald R. Garcia

August 28, 2011

Floridians have a vested interest in assisting felons who want to re-enter society, become law-abiding citizens and ensure they stay on the straight-and-narrow path. Gov. Rick Scott and the Cabinet recently approved new clemency rules to require specific waiting periods to restore civil rights of felons and to enforce a strict 10-year waiting period for full pardons. Clemency approval will assist felons in obtaining certain jobs, state licenses, bonds, government contracts and/or security clearances.

Specifically, the restoration of civil rights `restores to an applicant all of the rights of citizenship ` voting, serving on a jury and seeking elected office ` in Florida enjoyed before the felony conviction, except the specific authority to own, possess or use firearms. _

The Clemency Board meets four times per year in Tallahassee to hear public testimony and vote on clemency applications. To obtain clemency, the applicant must receive approval by the governor and two Cabinet members.

Conversely, a full pardon unconditionally releases a person from punishment and forgives guilt for any Florida conviction. It restores all of the rights of citizenship possessed by the applicant before his or her conviction, including the right to own, possess or use firearms. At least 10 years must pass since the felon completed his sentence.

Additionally, Attorney General Pam Bondi supported a new law to `decouple_ state licenses from RCRs unless the felony conviction is `directly related_ to the desired license. Gov. Scott signed this decoupling law, but the key will be how state agencies implement it.

The next clemency meeting is Sept. 22 at the Capitol. I encourage every Floridian to learn more about the clemency and civil rights restoration process.

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