

NEWS

Convicted felon from Duluth given 15-month sentence for ineligible voting

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PUBLISHED: December 1, 2011 at 11:01 p.m. | UPDATED: November 12, 2015 at 5:39 p.m.

A Duluth man charged over the summer with ineligible voting has been sentenced to 15 months in prison for a crime that usually results in probation.

Antonio Vassel “Detroit” Brown, 48, was one of six people charged in St. Louis County with “voting while ineligible” in the November 2008 general election because they were convicted felons. Under Minnesota law, a person is ineligible to vote if their civil rights have not been restored after being convicted of a felony or of treason. Citizens also are ineligible to vote if they’ve been found legally incompetent or the court has revoked their right to vote.

The crime is a felony, but it’s considered to be at the bottom of the Minnesota Sentencing Guidelines 1-to-11 severity scale: murder is an 11 and voting violations are a 1. While the maximum sentence is five years in prison and a \$10,000 fine, a conviction is likely to result in probation unless the ineligible voter has a record of several felonies.

Brown has been convicted of multiple felonies in multiple states and had to be brought to the St. Louis County Courthouse in Duluth from the Minnesota Correctional Facility in Lino Lakes, where he is incarcerated.

Following sentencing guidelines, Judge John DeSanto sentenced him to 15 months in prison for the voting violation. But the sentence will be served at the same time as his current sentence, so he will not spend additional time in prison.

According to the criminal complaint against him, Brown voted in the November 2008 general election. Brown was not imprisoned at the time and told an investigator that his probation officer said he could vote because “no one checks up on it.” The probation officer was interviewed by police and said he never told Brown such a thing. He said he typically tells probationers about their loss of civil rights.

St. Louis County Attorney Mark Rubin said his office reviewed 65 potential cases of ineligible voting and six were deemed to have sufficient probable cause to bring charges.

The only other defendant sentenced so far was given probation. Lavern Antoinette Bowman, 41, of Duluth pleaded guilty to voting while ineligible and was sentenced last month to two years of supervised probation and ordered to do 40 hours of community service.

The other four defendants have not had their cases resolved. Two of the cases have been scheduled for trial.

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