ALBANY — Thousands of ex-prisoners are being denied the right to vote, according to a survey released Wednesday by two advocacy groups.

Representatives at more than one-third of New York's county election boards responded incorrectly to questions about the rights of probationers and people with felony convictions to vote. The results are an improvement over a similar survey in 2003, but they are still unacceptable, said speakers from the Brennan Center for Justice at New York University Law School and Demos, a group that promotes democratic ideals.

"Local boards are illegally blocking thousands of eligible voters from registering to vote," Lawrence Norden of the Brennan Center said.

Two years ago, more than half of election boards, including all five New York City boroughs, refused to register people with felony convictions until they provided various documents not required by law.

Those results prompted the state Board of Elections to send a memo to county boards in October 2003, clarifying what people's rights are.

The new survey, conducted late last year, found boards are still requesting information they are not authorized to seek and denying voters their rights. The documents some are asking for frequently do not exist, such as a "certificate of release," a "document of relief from a judge," and a "release form showing that a person has paid his dues."

As problems continue, based on the groups' findings, Democratic lawmakers working with the Brennan Center and Demos said they are drafting legislation that would require the state to crack down on non-compliant election boards and assess penalties.

These are some of the survey's findings: 24 of the 63 election boards incorrectly responded that people on probation are not eligible to vote; 20 boards continue to illegally request documentation before allowing individuals with criminal convictions to register; and officials from four counties said they were familiar with a 2003 state Board of Elections memo.
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