

March 27, 2024

Testimony on HB 627
Election Law - Automatic Voter Registration - State Correctional Facilities
Education, Environment, and the Environment

Position: Favorable

Common Cause Maryland supports HB 627 which would designate the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services (DPSCS) an agency covered by the automatic voter registration (AVR) program, ensuring eligible individuals are provided the opportunity to register to vote upon release.

Maryland's AVR program has proven to be successful. Since going into effect in 2019, thousands have been able to seamlessly register to vote while interacting with the MVA, local social service agencies, the Maryland healthcare exchange, and the mobility office of the Maryland Transit Administration. These agencies were selected to be part of the AVR program because they have the sufficient information necessary to register voters. DPSCS also has the information needed to become a designated agency within the program.

DPSCS becoming a designated AVR agency will enhance and build on the success of the program. Many returning citizens are unaware their right to vote has been restored and that they can register and vote once released. While DPSCS is currently required to include voter registration forms in eligible individuals release packet, returning a completed paper form is an inconvenience for most voters. The forms must either be returned by mail or in-person at a local board of elections office unless the forms are completed closer to the election where secure drop boxes are available. AVR would remove the need for paper forms and instead provide a secure electronic process to register.

Voting allows individuals to maintain a connection with their communities during incarceration, which can be instrumental for effective re-entry.

Voting is the most essential form of political expression and the right to do so is fundamental to an open democracy. Expanding the designated agencies within the AVR program to include DPSCS will ensure returning citizens know their right has been restored and increase their access to and participation in our elections.

We favorably report on HB 627.