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**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE 1022 – ELECTION LAW –
INCARCERATED INDIVIDUALS – VOTING ELIGIBILITY AND ACCESS
(VOTING RIGHTS FOR ALL ACT)
March 7, 2024**

The American predicament of rising inequality and low voter participation (compared with other wealthy nations) is rooted in the vicious cycle of big money in politics, lobbying, and a corrupted, cynical Congress. Various voter suppression strategies only exacerbate the problem.

Restoring citizen engagement can rectify this systemic threat to democracy, and the bill under consideration provides a step forward by restoring voting rights to persons convicted of felonies. Only persons convicted of buying or selling votes would be excluded from voting – a policy that we recommended in 2016. Engaging offenders in the democratic process through voting is common-sense way to build positive values and promote successful reintegration into the community following incarceration.

The real question is, *what is the risk to society of convicted felons voting?* We cannot think of any. In Maine, Vermont, and Washington, DC, incarcerated felons retain voting rights. Although there are barriers to participation, there are no reports that this practice creates problems affecting the welfare of the community at large.

HB 1022 has a practical method of encouraging incarcerated individuals to vote by placing drop boxes in facilities and by appointing a voting rights ombudsman for incarcerated individuals.

The policy of excluding felons from voting has historical roots in the Jim Crowⁱ era when white-dominated states sought to exclude African Americans from voting. The policy at that time was a way to avoid some of the consequences of the 15th Amendment for those who sought to continue white supremacy. HB 1022 presents a concrete step toward embracing equality for all.

We urge a favorable report, and we also hope you will consider adding the provisions of HB 627 to this bill so that the Department of Corrections and Public Safety would routinely provide voter registration information to the State Board of Elections.

ⁱ <https://www.themarshallproject.org/2019/06/11/in-just-two-states-all-prisoners-can-vote-here-s-why-few-do>