



**Testimony of Sunwoo Oh
Senior Associate
Stand Up America**

**In support of House Bill 1022
to Guarantee Voting Rights Regardless of Incarceration Status
Submitted to the Maryland House Judiciary Committee**

March 5, 2024

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 1022 to guarantee voting rights to all citizens, regardless of incarceration status. Stand Up America is a national grassroots organization working at the local, state, and federal levels to build a truly representative democracy, including by protecting and expanding voting rights. We are grateful for Delegate Jhneanelle Wilkins for her leadership on House Bill 1022.

The right to vote should not be up for debate. Yet, [4.6 million Americans](#) are unable to fulfill their civic duty because of laws preventing people who are incarcerated or formerly incarcerated from voting.

Restoring the freedom to vote for formerly and currently incarcerated Americans gives them the opportunity to fulfill their civic duty, successfully re-integrate into their communities, and make all our communities safer. Voting is a fundamental right that empowers us to have a say in the decisions that impact our lives and communities. Citizenship doesn't stop at the prison gates, and neither should the freedom to vote.

Momentum to Expand the Vote

Polling sponsored by Stand Up America, The Sentencing Project, Common Cause, and State Innovation Exchange, found that [56 percent of voters](#) support laws to guarantee the right to vote for all citizens 18 and older, including those in prison.

Given those results, it should come as no surprise that in addition to the strong grassroots movement in Maryland, there is also a national movement to end felony disenfranchisement.

There is an active movement at the federal level to pass both the Democracy Restoration Act ([H.R.4987](#)/[S.1677](#)), which would guarantee voting rights to citizens who have completed their

sentences, and the Inclusive Democracy Act ([H.R.6643/S.3423](#)), which would expand voting rights to include those who are currently incarcerated, setting the tone for this growing reform.

In recent years, the District of Columbia has restored voting rights to citizens who are still incarcerated, and many states have also restored voting rights to citizens post-incarceration through legislation, executive action, and ballot initiative.

Stand Up America's nearly two million members have advocated for federal legislation and helped pass rights restoration legislation in New York, Connecticut, and New Mexico. In Oregon and Illinois, our members are advocating to restore voting rights to currently incarcerated citizens. In both states, there are strong grassroots movements and legislative leadership behind passing legislation similar to House Bill 1022. Our community has driven over 10,000 emails and calls to lawmakers in support of voting rights restoration across the country.

This is a moment for Maryland to also step up as a leader in restoring the right to vote regardless of incarceration status.

Racial Justice Impact

Similar to poll taxes and literacy tests, felony disenfranchisement laws are Jim Crow relics designed to deny Black Americans the freedom to vote, and cannot be divorced from their original racist intent. [One in 19 Black Americans](#) of voting age is disenfranchised, a rate 3.5 times higher than the non-Black population.

Today, disenfranchisement laws disproportionately affect poor people and people of color, as they are more likely to be convicted of crimes and lose their freedom to vote while wealthy individuals can afford the best legal defense money can buy. Furthermore, [one million women are disenfranchised](#), making up approximately one-fifth of the total disenfranchised population. Since [a majority of women](#) in America's prisons are mothers, felony disenfranchisement laws keep mothers from having a say in the policies impacting their children.

All Americans should have a say in who represents them in government and the policies that affect their lives – from the quality of their kids' education to access to parks and clean water – just like everyone else. And, Americans who are in the government's custody should also have a say in who represents them in government and control their freedom.

* * *

Stand Up America applauds House Bill 1022 and calls on the Maryland House Judiciary Committee to advance this crucial democracy bill.