

February 4, 2026

Testimony on HB 115
Election Law - Individuals Released from State Correctional Facilities - Automatic
Restoration of Voter Registration
Government, Labor, and Elections Committee

Position: Favorable

Common Cause Maryland supports HB 115 which would ensure eligible voters who are being released from Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services (DPSCS) facilities have access to voter registration.

The right to vote is fundamental to our democracy, yet thousands of Marylanders who have served their sentences remain disenfranchised due to unnecessary bureaucratic barriers.

Marylanders serving a sentence for felony convictions are prohibited from voting. The Court regularly sends a list of individuals who were once eligible to vote but are now prohibited from voting to the State Board of Elections (SBE). They are then automatically removed from the voter rolls. In 2016, Maryland law established that, upon release from incarceration, an individual with a felony conviction automatically regained the right to vote. But barriers to voting access for returning citizens persist. While SBE is required to automatically strike them from the voter rolls, there is no process to ensure their registration is restored and that they are notified of their rights. While the General Assembly passed legislation in 2021 ensuring that returning citizens had access to voter registration during the release process, the legislation did not go far enough.

While DPSCS is currently required to include voter registration forms in eligible individuals' release packets, 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 they are completed closer to the election and returned to a secure drop box.

HB 115 will make the voter registration process more accessible for those eligible voters who are going home. It would require that SBE use existing secure processes to restore the voter registration of any eligible voter released from a DPSCS facility who was previously registered to vote in Maryland. To facilitate the identification of these voters, each week the DPSCS would send the SBE a list of the names and new residential addresses of anyone released the preceding week from a state correctional facility. Then, SBE confirms eligibility and restores the registration or processes the new registration.

Civic engagement is a key factor in successful reentry. Studies have shown that individuals who vote and participate in their communities are less likely to reoffend. When people leaving incarceration feel included in society, they are more likely to engage in pro-social behaviors and reintegrate successfully.

Voting is the most essential form of political expression, and the right to do so is fundamental to an open democracy. HB 115 ensures returning citizens know their rights have been restored and increases their access to and participation in our elections.

We urge a favorable report.