



WRITTEN TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 115
Individuals Released From State Correctional Facilities-
Automatic Restoration of Voter Registration

TO: Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Government, Labor, and Elections Committee

FROM: **Trina Selden**, Founder and Executive Director, Out For Justice

DATE: **February 4, 2026**

My name is **Trina Selden**, and I am the Founder and Executive Director of **Out for Justice, Inc.**, a community-based organization dedicated to engaging, educating, and empowering people impacted by the legal system to build collective power, reduce recidivism, and dismantle harmful and exclusionary policies. I submit this testimony in **strong support of House Bill 115**.

For nearly two decades, Out for Justice has worked to advance fair elections, protect access to the ballot, and ensure that communities historically excluded from civic life—particularly returning citizens, Black communities, and low-income residents—are able to fully participate in our democracy.

When I came home from prison in 2003, reentry felt almost impossible. I struggled to obtain basic identification—my birth certificate, Social Security card, and driver's license. But one of the most devastating losses I experienced was the loss of my **right to vote**. Even after completing probation, I was misinformed and denied the ability to register. At a time when I was rebuilding my life, I was not recognized as a valid participant in the democratic process. My voice did not count.

That experience is why I founded **Out for Justice in 2006**—to challenge the dead ends justice-impacted people face and to restore dignity, voice, and opportunity. Our work helped launch **Ban the Box** in Maryland and paved the way for reforms like the **Value My Vote Act**, restoring voting rights to tens of thousands of Marylanders. These victories share a simple lesson: **people succeed when systems are designed to include them, not exclude them**.

HB115 applies that lesson in a practical and common-sense way. The bill requires the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services to share release information with the State Board of Elections so that individuals who were previously registered to vote have their registration **automatically restored upon release**. It also ensures returning citizens receive notice of their status and information on how to update or decline registration.

Although Maryland has made important progress on voting rights, the current system still places unnecessary burdens on people during one of the most unstable moments of their lives. Gaps between release and registration—often requiring visits to the MVA or navigating unfamiliar processes—lead to confusion, missed opportunities, and unnecessary disenfranchisement.



HB115 closes that gap by aligning voter registration with the release process, when people are already receiving critical reentry information. It reflects reality: people leaving incarceration are focused on housing, employment, health care, and reconnecting with family. They should not have to wait, guess, or jump through hoops to regain their voice.

This is not only about access—it is about **public safety and community stability**. Research consistently shows that civic engagement and a sense of belonging reduce recidivism and strengthen communities. Disenfranchisement isolates people at the very moment we should be encouraging responsibility, connection, and investment.

HB 115 also benefits the State by reducing administrative burden, minimizing errors, and creating a more efficient and reliable process for election officials. It is a policy that works for returning citizens **and** for government.

At its core, **HB115 affirms that incarceration should not permanently sever someone's relationship with democracy**. It separates punishment from fundamental human rights and strengthens our shared civic life.

For these reasons, **Out for Justice and I strongly urge a favorable report on HB115.**

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Trina Selden
Founder and Executive Director
Out For Justice