



# Baltimore-Washington Conference

The United Methodist Church

REV. DR. STACEY COLE WILSON

EXECUTIVE MINISTER OF JUSTICE AND SERVICE

TEL. 240-581-5366

**January 27, 2020**

## **Re: WRITTEN TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB91 - VOTER REGISTRATION FOR PRE-RELEASED INMATES**

Dear Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee:

*Grace and Peace to you.*

As a U.S. citizen and person of faith who believes in our common humanity, universal suffrage, and that every state must do all within her power to eliminate discriminatory practices that would preclude and or/limit the constitutional right to vote (to include felony disenfranchisement), I kindly implore you to consider and vote in support of SB91 – Voter Registration for Pre-Released Inmates.

By divine endowment and in accordance with the second paragraph of the United States Declaration of Independence, we affirm that all persons are created equal. Yet, our U.S. Voter history reminds us that there have been many inequities and disenfranchisement practices when interpreting the meaning and application of this law:

- In 1776, only men of European descent age twenty-one and older who were landowners with specific state-by-state ownership qualifications could vote.
- In 1868, The 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution granted full citizenship rights, including voting rights, to all men born or naturalized in the United States.
- 1870, the 15th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution eliminated racial barriers to voting; however, many states continued practicing voter discrimination. Poll taxes, literacy tests, fraud, and intimidation still prevented many from voting.
- In 1924, The Indian Citizenship Act granted Native Americans citizenship and voting rights.
- In 1964, The federal Civil Rights Act was passed to ensure that all men and women age 21 and older, regardless of race, religion, or education, have the right to vote. The 24th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution was ratified, eliminating poll taxes nationwide.
- In 1965, The federal Voting Rights Act suspended literacy tests. Registration and voting rights are now federally enforced.
- In 1971, The 26th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution lowered the voting age to 18.
- In 1984, The federal Voting Accessibility for the Elderly and Handicapped Act required polling places to be accessible to people with disabilities.
- In 2016, Maryland's legislature enacted HB 980 and SB 340 (overriding a veto) so that voting rights are automatically restored after completion of the term of incarceration.

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BECOMING FULLY ALIVE IN CHRIST AND MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN A DIVERSE AND EVER-CHANGING WORLD



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I celebrate the sixteen regions to include Maryland and the District of Columbia for granting automatic restoration of voter rights upon release.

This brief timeline doesn't mention the 6.1+ million Americans\* who are forbidden to vote because of felony disenfranchisement or laws restricting voting rights (per state) for those convicted of felony level crimes.

Hence, in 2020 we continue our efforts and actions to eliminate voter suppression, discrimination, poll taxes and any other methods used to preclude persons from registering and exercising their universal right to vote.

Thus, we must take every step to require a correctional facility, before releasing an inmate who has completed a sentence of imprisonment for a felony conviction, to provide the inmate with a voter registration form and inform the inmate that (1) the inmate will have the right to vote after the inmate's release from the correctional facility and (2) the inmate must register to vote after the inmate's release from the correctional facility to exercise the right to vote.

Will you vote in support of SB-91 today?

**Respectfully,**

*Stacey Cole Wilson*

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