

Indivisible HoCoMD

TESTIMONY TO THE SENATE EDUCATION, HEALTH, AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

HB0372 Election Law - Correctional Facilities - Voter Registration and Voting

POSITION: Support

by: Christine Lemyze, Defend Democracy Team Lead, Indivisible Howard County

Date: March 4, 2020

Indivisible Howard County supports SB0372 which would require the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services to provide each individual who is released from a correctional facility with a voter registration application and documentation informing the individual that the individual's voting rights have been restored; it would also require the State Board of Elections to adopt certain regulations establishing a program to inform eligible voters incarcerated in correctional facilities of upcoming elections and how to exercise the right to vote; etc.

Since 2016 in Maryland, formerly incarcerated individuals have the right to vote, immediately upon release, but many are not aware of this or may not know how to register to vote. It is simply a matter of justice and equality to ensure that these individuals be informed of their rights and given voter registration information.

In Maryland, there is no system to ensure that incarcerated individuals either in pre-trial or convicted of a misdemeanor and who have the right to vote are in fact able to do so. We firmly believe that every citizen eligible to vote should be able to exercise that right and that it is the responsibility of the State Board of Elections to ensure that such a system to provide voting information, access to ballots and the ability to fill these ballots be in place.

Finally, beyond ensuring that voting, the most basic right in our democracy, is indeed accessible to all, this bill would also have a beneficial societal impact as academic and government research has shown a lower recidivism rate among those previously incarcerated individuals who vote.

Indivisible Howard County urges a favorable report on SB0372.