HB0051   Support

House Ways and Means committee

Good morning Chairman Kaiser, Vice- chair Del. Walker and committee members,

I am Candy Clark speaking on behalf of Maryland Alliance for Justice (MAJR) in support of HB0051 Voting Registration. MAJR advocates for prison reform and we are working together to address the problem of mass incarceration in Maryland .We use evidence-based practices to strengthen our communities by supporting families, helping people returning from jails and prisons lead productive lives, and preventing crime.

Legally when a returning citizen completes the sentence that the correctional system deems appropriate for the person's offence that person has legally "paid his/her dues" to society and is released with the understanding that they are now ready to integrate back into our communities.  Yet in reality they continue to face barriers (collateral consequences) that hinder their progress to make a successful transition; for example disqualification for housing, food stamps, job opportunities, transportation difficulties, plus prejudices from others. These situations indicate that they are still deemed unacceptable. These stigmas add to their isolation and challenges.  In 2016 a law reestablished the right of those with felony conviction to vote after release. This sends a positive message that their voice in our government is accepted and can be heard.

HBB0051 provides the information and documents that ease the process for returning citizens to register to vote.  There are many adjustments and barriers to navigate during reentry, let's help our returning citizens by removing some of the bumps that make it difficult for their voices to be heard. The voices of our returning citizens are important.

 As Martin Luther King said – "Our lives begin to end the day we become SILENT about things that matter."

MAJR requests a favorable vote for HB0051.
Thank you for your service.