

February 11, 2020

Chair Anne Kaiser, House Ways and Means Committee
Room 131, House Office Building
Chair Luke Clippinger, House Judiciary Committee
Room 101, House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401



House Bill 568 – Election Law – Correctional Facilities – Voter Registration and Voting - FAVORABLE

Dear Chairs Kaiser and Clippinger and members of the House Ways and Means and Judiciary Committees,

Baltimore Harm Reduction Coalition (BHRC), an advocacy organization that mobilizes community members for the health, dignity, and safety of people targeted by the war on drugs and anti- sex worker policies, supports House Bill 568.

This bill will require the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services to notify individuals being released from incarceration that their voting rights have been restored, and to provide them with a voter registration application.

The decades-long war on drugs has been a significant contributor to Maryland's high incarceration rate and has consequently disenfranchised countless residents. Considering **Black Marylanders, especially those living in lower income neighborhoods, are more likely to be charged and prosecuted for drug-related offenses**, the war on drugs has effectively disenfranchised Black Marylanders at higher rates than white people. And due to stigma and misinformation, many people aren't aware that Maryland law restores the right to vote once someone has left a correctional facility.

Engaging people in the political process not only strengthens our democracy, it also enhances public safety. Research has shown that people with past convictions who vote are significantly less likely to be re-arrested than those who don't vote. Notifying individuals about their voting rights upon re-entry is a small gesture to welcome people back into our communities.

BHRC respectfully requests the Committee give this measure a **favorable report**. Thank you for your consideration.

For more information about BHRC or this position, please contact Tricia Christensen at Tricia@BaltimoreHarmReduction.org.