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THINK JEWISHLY. ACT LOCALLY.

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB568

Election Law - Correctional Facilities - Voter Registration & Voting

TO: Chair Kaiser, Vice Chair Washington, and members of the Ways and Means Committee

FROM: Carol Stern on behalf of Jews United for Justice

I am testifying in favor of HB 568 as a mother and grandmother, and as co-chair of the Equal Justice under the Law team of Jews United for Justice (JUFJ). JUFJ organizes the Jewish community to fight for racial, economic, and social justice in Maryland and DC and engages nearly 5,000 people across the state.

The Jewish text that shapes my religious and moral conviction that everyone should have the Right to Vote is the directive issued in Deuteronomy 16:20, "Tzedek, tzedek tirdof - Justice, justice shall you pursue." The Jewish sages explain that the word tzedek is repeated not only for emphasis but to teach us that in our pursuit of justice, our means must be as just as our ends. Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan wrote "teach us to respect the integrity of every human soul be it that of a friend or stranger, child or adult." When we are working to assure voting rights for all people, I believe we must demand that it operates in accordance with these deeply held Jewish beliefs.

As a mother of two children and a grandmother of three, I cannot imagine anyone preventing them from exercising their right to vote if they were eligible even if they were being held in a correctional facility. I remember the excitement that I experienced the first time I voted and I have never missed an opportunity to vote in any election since 1968. Voting is the hallmark of our democracy and I was thrilled to take my son and my daughter to the polls when they turned eighteen and could vote for the first time.

No eligible voter should be denied the opportunity to vote. This is not the kind of democracy that our State of Maryland should maintain. This bill would give access to the ballot for eligible Marylanders who are incarcerated, who are disproportionately brown and black citizens, due to structural racism. It would also provide enhanced training and educational materials to probation and parole officers about voting rights of returning citizens. No Marylander should

face obstacles to having their voices heard, since our democracy works best when everyone votes.

On behalf of JUFJ, **I respectfully urge a favorable report on HB 568.**