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Committees: Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs, and Judicial Proceedings
Testimony on: SB 224 “Election Law – Correctional Facilities – Voter Registration and Voting”
Position: Favorable
Hearing Date: February 4, 2021

The Maryland Sierra Club urges a favorable report on SB 224, a bill that would improve access to registration and voting, and to information about registration and voting, for eligible individuals incarcerated in a correctional facility or being released from a correctional facility.

The Sierra Club and its members care about both the natural and human environments, including ending racial and social injustice. We believe that providing information about and access to registration and voting to all who are eligible should be viewed as fundamental to our democracy.

The state and local boards of elections have for years made special efforts to provide access to registration and voting for residents of nursing homes and other residential facilities for senior citizens, but do not have similar organized efforts for residents of other self-contained facilities such as correctional facilities.

Many individuals who are resident in a correctional facility are in fact eligible to vote, including large numbers who are awaiting trial or convicted of only a misdemeanor. Because mobility of those individuals is restricted, boards of elections need to make special effort as would be required by this bill to allow those individuals a fair opportunity to register and vote.

Individuals being released from a correctional facility may encounter confusion or misinformation about their right to register and vote, partly because of news or social media posts about laws in other states that are different from the laws in Maryland. To avoid any confusion and to inform individuals being released about their right to vote under Maryland law, it is important to provide them with the application and documentation that would be required by this bill.

Voting is the foundation of our democracy, and we believe it is essential to racial and social justice to guarantee access to registration and voting to every individual who is eligible.

We urge a favorable report on SB 224.

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Founded in 1892, the Sierra Club is America’s oldest and largest grassroots environmental organization. The Maryland Chapter has over 70,000 members and supporters, and the Sierra Club nationwide has approximately 800,000 members.