

REPRESENT MARYLAND

#FIGHT FOR DEMOCRACY

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BILL: SB0224

BILL TITLE: Election Law – Correctional Facilities – Voter Registration and Voting

BILL SPONSOR: Senator West

POSITION: Favorable

COMMITTEE: EHEA

HEARING DATE: February 2, 2021

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB0224

Cristi Demnowicz, Chair
Represent Maryland

Represent Maryland is an all-volunteer, member and individual donor-funded group of statewide activists and advocates who fight for democracy at the local and state level. We formed in 2015 to fight against the influence of big money in politics and to ensure that everyone can participate in our democratic system of governance, regardless of financial status. Since forming we've expanded our priorities to include ending all forms of voter suppression.

Not giving voting access to citizens who are in jail but legally have the right to vote (i.e. pre-trial individuals and those with misdemeanor convictions) is absolutely a form of voter suppression and goes against our vision of Democracy for America. But sadly, this practice is as American as apple pie. Jail, prison, and felony voter suppression are rampant across the country and in some ways Maryland is no different than deep south states like Alabama and Louisiana who use these practices to uphold white supremacy.

Using incarceration status to control who can and can't vote has been carried out in America for over 150 years, and it has had one purpose: to reduce votes cast by African Americans and other non-white citizens, usually men. Because of this practice, only certain demographics of society are historically elected to legislatures, giving them disproportionate influence in creating the laws and policies governing society. This results in a government that serves some people as opposed to all people.

America is going through a moral and historic reckoning. Now is the time to acknowledge past harm and make substantial changes to create a society that works for all people, including those who have found themselves in jail. Incarcerated persons must be given access to the ballot and Maryland should be a leading example on righting this decades old wrong. We ask that you find SB0224 favorable and move it to the senate floor this session.

Represent Maryland is a grassroots anti-corruption group of citizen advocates that #FightForDemocracy in Maryland. Our democracy solutions include: Public Election Funds, Independent Redistricting, Special Elections, Ranked Choice Voting, Increased Ethics and Transparency, and Increased Voter Participation. Learn more about our work at www.RepresentMaryland.org
Authorized by Represent Maryland PAC, T Miler, Treasurer