

Kimberly Haven

January 22, 2024

Chairman Will Smith
Vice Chairman Jeff Waldstreicher
Senate Judicial Proceeding Committee

Senate Bill 34 –
Jury Disqualification
POSITION: FAVORABLE

Members of the Senate Judicial Proceeding Committee,

My name is Kimberly Haven, and ***I offer this testimony in support of SB 34.***

Jury service is one of the most important civic duties in our country. I am here today on behalf of myself as well as thousands of Maryland citizens who are excluded from doing our civic duty simply because of a prior felony conviction.

Every year, I get a jury summons. Every year, I must (and do diligently) submit all kinds of documentation about my criminal record. And every year, I get a recurring “No thanks.”

The disqualification simply because of a prior felony conviction is rooted solely in an ideology that is unsupported by evidence and is based solely on bias and stigmatization. The rationale I hear on this topic is a fear of bias. This would have you believe that we would sympathize with a defendant and even have resentment toward the prosecution. If we were allowed to serve, we would acquit in all cases, and destroy the impartiality of the jury process.

Evidence does not support this – Disqualifying someone with a felony conviction does not make our justice system fairer or just. What it does do, is keep people like me confined to permanent second-class citizen status. It is a bad solution to a nonexistent problem.

Jury service is not just a duty but also a constitutional right for all citizens of our country.

I did not stop being a citizen because I have a felony conviction.

There is no rationale...there is no evidence to support to support denying individuals the right to be fully engaged in the civic process. It is a duty, it is a responsibility, and it is one that I, and the thousands like me, would be able to perform under SB 34 and would provide a way to contribute meaningfully to the jury process.

SB 34 would end the harsh and draconian collateral consequences that we carry with us long after we have completed our court ordered sentences. It is time to address these issues and ensure a more inclusive and just legal system for everyone.

Respectfully submitted,

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