

Monday, February 24, 2025



Showing Up for Racial Justice

Dear Members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee,

I am submitting this testimony as a member of Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ) Baltimore, a group of individuals working to mobilize white people in a multi-racial movement for equity and racial justice in Baltimore City, Baltimore County, and Howard County. We are also working in collaboration with Out for Justice, which advocates for the reform of policies and practices that adversely affect incarcerated people's successful reintegration into society. I am a resident of Baltimore City and District 41. I am testifying in **support of SB0647, the Voting Rights for All Act.**

Americans have a long history of believing, without any real basis other than "gut instinct," that being convicted of a crime makes you unsuited to the responsibilities of citizenship, including voting. But this idea that anyone should be barred from voting is deeply undemocratic.

In addition, the historic over-prosecution of Black communities that leads to their over-representation in our prison populations has meant that this is the group most widely disenfranchised by laws which bar felons from voting.

Over the past two decades, Maryland has taken important steps toward fixing these inequities: in 2007, the MGA passed legislation letting people convicted of felonies vote once their sentence was completed, and in 2016, that was expanded to include people who had completed any term of imprisonment. It is time for Maryland to take the final step and make sure that **every adult Marylander** has the ability to vote.

SB0647 would re-enfranchise our fellow citizens who are serving sentences. It would also require the State Board of Elections to establish a voter hotline for incarcerated persons to allow them to request information about voting and assist them in exercising their right to do so. This will ensure that despite not having free access to the internet and other

resources, people who are incarcerated can still meaningfully exercise their right to vote. Any costs associated with the hotline should be at least partially offset by the costs saved when the Board of Elections no longer has to monitor criminal convictions across several courts and ensure people who are convicted of felonies are removed from the rolls.

Maryland should close the book on the racist legacy of felon disenfranchisement once and for all. It is for these reasons that I am encouraging you to vote **in support of SB0647, the Voting Rights for All Act.**

Thank you for your time, service, and consideration.

Sincerely,
Dr. Katherine Blaha
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