

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 647
Gwendolyn Levi

Good afternoon, Senators. Thank you for this opportunity to speak on behalf of SB 647. As a justice impacted individual, who served 16 yrs of an original 400 month federal sentence (Conspiracy to Distribute); I was privileged to serve nine of those as federal resident at Maryland Correctional Institution for Women /Jessup.

During this time, many of us gathered to discuss pending legislation, writing/advocating in support or opposition to legislation that essentially affected all aspects of our lives both inside and outside the facility. We contacted family, wrote legislators, lobbied organizations to offer our input and to have some influence - the one thing we couldn't do that would ultimately make a difference was vote!

With the passage of SB 647, more than 16,000 residents serving felony sentences will be able to have a decisive impact on not just their lives but the lives of their families and all Marylanders.

During the past 4 1/2 years since my release in 2020, working with such groups as Maryland Justice Project, Out for Justice, We All Vote, we traversed the state, educating and registering formerly incarcerated individuals. I say *educating*, because many did not know that upon release, or incarcerated for misdemeanor offenses, their voting rights had been restored in Maryland. Now we look forward to continuing that work to educate and register those serving felony sentences to vote. Restoring that right will be another milestone in Maryland's progressive leadership in criminal justice reform.

I urge you to vote favorably on SB 647, allowing Maryland to join Maine, Vermont, Puerto Rico and Washington, DC in restoring the essential right to vote to all. Again, thank you all for your consideration.