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SB0647

February 26, 2025

TO: Members of the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

FROM: Nina Themelis, Director of Mayor's Office of Government Relations

RE: Senate Bill 647 - Election Law - Incarcerated Individuals - Voter Hotline and Voting Eligibility (Voting Rights for All Act)

POSITION: Support

Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and Members of the Committee, please be advised that the Baltimore City Administration (BCA) respectfully requests a **favorable** committee report on Senate Bill (SB) 647 - Election Law - Incarcerated Individuals - Voter Hotline and Voting Eligibility (Voting Rights for All Act)

Sb 647 would remove provisions from Article – Election Law of the Annotated Code of Maryland that disqualify Marylanders convicted of a felony and serving a term of imprisonment from voting. In addition, this bill would no longer require the names and addresses of all individuals convicted of a felony and sentenced to imprisonment with commitment papers to the State Administrator for the purpose of rendering them ineligible to vote. SB 647 repeals a provision of existing law that defines individuals who vote while serving a felony term of imprisonment as guilt of a felony. Finally, SB 647 would require the State Board of Elections to provide a toll-free voter hotline for incarcerated individuals to receive information on voting, request voting materials, and report voting rights violations.

SB 647 bolsters voting rights and protections within the state of Maryland for one of the most democratically marginalized demographics in the state/nation, incarcerated individuals (particularly those convicted of a felony). This bill is particularly transformative as it would affirmatively address the inequitable disenfranchisement of Black Marylanders.

As of fiscal year 2023, the percentage of Maryland's incarcerated population who were Black was 72.4%, the highest of any state and over double that of the national average. This is despite Black Marylanders representing less than one-third the total state population. Under current law which disqualifies these incarcerated individuals convicted of a felony from voting, the revocation of voting rights disproportionately disenfranchises Black Marylanders.

For the above reasons and Baltimore City's commitment to improving the equity of its Black residents, the BCA respectfully requests a **favorable** committee report on Senate Bill 647.