

**Testimony for the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
February 26, 2025**

In support of:

SB 647 - Election Law - Incarcerated Individuals - Voter Hotline and Voting Eligibility (Voting Rights for All Act)

I believe that the vote is the voice of the community. I believe that voting is one of the strongest ways a community can voice their concerns. When I voted for the first time in 42 years, it was extremely empowering. For the first time – even though I’ve done a lot of organizing, mentoring and activism – I felt anchored in my community.

The power and importance of the vote is underestimated. Many people don’t understand the importance of their vote. But, for every individual like myself - who comes home from incarceration and *can* vote - it’s a boost for the individual as well as for others who are waiting to come home. It is inspiring to people. And inspired people get involved.

If I would have had the opportunity to vote while I was incarcerated, I would have felt like I wasn’t someone who was forgotten because of a mistake I made in this life. It would have been motivating to jump start my goals even faster. I would have felt like I mattered; that I mattered to my community, and that I mattered to the powers that be. It would have been different if I felt like the system valued my right to vote. That would have aided me in more quickly becoming the man that I am today.

I want people to know that their vote and their voice matters. While I was incarcerated in the Maryland House of Corrections, there was a critical bill that directly impacted incarcerated Marylanders and our families. I organized a proxy vote campaign that involved reaching out to the population of 3000 people. We got a great turnout, which told me that people want to feel like they matter and one of the ways to show that that they matter most is by giving them the right to exercise their vote. That is a right that should never be taken away, no matter what someone did. Especially when you consider people of color, who for so long were denied the vote and no amount of removal of barriers will make up for all of the years of not being allowed to vote.

Every local, every state, and the federal government owe it to all Americans to make up for the past of denying people of color the franchise by ensuring that every person has the right to vote. If you’re really serious about erasing the ills of the past, there’s no better way than to allow every individual access to the franchise and the right to vote. Let them vote their conscience for a stronger, healthier society, and to contribute to reducing urban blight and violence in communities. Giving these individuals behind the wall the right to vote will be the impetus to get more involved now and when they come home.

I came out after 42 years. I entered at 21 and came out at 64. I had struggles in the beginning, however a time came when I had an epiphany: I had to transform myself for me and for my community. This was the beginning of making amends with my community. I came out of prison with a Bachelor's degree in

Applied Psychology with a minor in Alcoholism and Drug Addiction from Coppin State University. I came out a certified peer recovery specialist and a trained mediator with 96 hours of mediation training. I came out a trained special education, K-12, and GED tutor, as well as a writing tutor for the University of Baltimore Second Chance College Program and a lead legal writing facilitator for the Criminal Defense & Prison Advocacy Clinic at Georgetown Law Center. I came out a Co-Founder of Project Emancipation Now, a gang emancipation, violence interruption, and victim/community impact services organization, which has helped hundreds of people in prison understand the error of their ways. Our organization has emancipated more men from gangs than any other organization in the state of Maryland – and only one out of 34 men has returned.

I appreciate the opportunity to share what the right to vote means to me, to my community, and to those who are still incarcerated in Maryland. For all of these reasons and more, I am writing to ask for the Committee's favorable support on **SB 647 – the Voting Rights for All Act**.

Sincerely,

Craig Muhammad
District 41



(My first time voting)