

**TESTIMONY ON HB 710
VOTING RIGHTS FOR ALL ACT**

**House Ways and Means Committee
March 11, 2024**

SUPPORT

Submitted by: **Magdalena Tsiongas, MPH**

Chair Atterbeary, Vice Chair Wilkins and members of the Ways and Means Committee:

I, Magdalena Tsiongas, am testifying in support of HB 710, the Voting Rights for All Act. I am submitting this testimony as the family member of an incarcerated person in a Maryland prison, John.

John has spent 18 years incarcerated, since he was 19 years old. He has never had the ability to vote, and unless the law changes, he never will. Disenfranchisement of people incarcerated with a felony sends a very clear message to those in prison. That their voices do not matter to elected officials. That their experiences do not matter, and that no one is listening to what is happening to them behind those prison walls.

Through my work as convenor of the MD Second Look Coalition, overwhelmed with the engagement from incarcerated people looking to be involved in the legislative process. We are in touch with lifers groups and individuals at every prison in MD, who are engaged in legislative work. Hundreds of men incarcerated at North Branch Correctional Institution signed a petition in support of our Second Look bill. In contact with lifers groups and individuals in every prison in the state who are sending us letters, stories, sending letters to legislators, asking how their families can get involved. Make no mistake that these individuals are itching for an opportunity to be involved in the process where decisions are being made each day about their lives and their freedom.

It should come as no surprise, that in MD, 72% of the incarcerated population is Black, while only 30% of the general population is. This inevitably means the disenfranchisement of poor Black and Brown people specifically and intentionally.

The right to vote should not be a negotiable one.

HB 710 would ensure that the right to vote is a right afforded to everyone in practice. It would allow incarcerated people the ability to have their voices heard in elections, elections that often directly impact the quality of their life and their freedom.

I urge you for a **favorable report** on HB 710.

Thank you.