



February, 11, 2025

Testimony on HB 710

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

Ways & Means Committee

Position: Favorable

My name is Melody Mitchell, I am an Out 4 Justice member, and I am writing to express my deep support for House Bill 710, the Voting Rights for All Act.

This issue is not just political to me, it is personal. I have experienced incarceration first hand, and I know what it feels like to be silenced, to feel as though my voice no longer matters, to be treated as less than human simply because of past mistakes. But no matter where a person is, no matter their circumstances, their voice should still count, especially when it comes to laws and policies that directly impact their lives. Right now in Maryland, over 16,000 citizens are disenfranchised because of criminal convictions. That's 16,000 people who live under the weight of laws they have no say in; 16,000 people who are told they must follow the rules of a system that refuses to acknowledge their humanity. A large percentage of those incarcerated in Maryland already come from communities that are underrepresented in government. The prison system should not be used as yet another tool to strip people of their power and silence their voices. Voting is not just a right, it is a crucial part of being a citizen. When someone is incarcerated, they do not stop being a person. They still have families, communities, and futures that are shaped by government decisions. They still have opinions about the laws that impact them. Allowing incarcerated individuals to vote is a step toward recognizing that their voices matter, that they are not disposable, and that they are still part of the society to which they will one day return. Research has shown that restoring voting rights helps with re-entry. When people feel included, when they feel like they are part of something bigger than their circumstances, they are more likely to reintegrate successfully into society. This isn't just about fairness, it's about public safety, about rehabilitation, about acknowledging that people are capable of growth and change. Other states, such as Maine, Vermont, and the District of Columbia recognize that a felony conviction should not strip someone of their right to vote. Maryland should follow their lead and allow those who have been silenced to speak. A person's right to have a say in their government should not be erased simply because they are incarcerated. How is that fair? House Bill 710 is about more than voting - it is about dignity. It is about acknowledging that every person, regardless of where they are, deserves to have their voice heard. It is about ensuring that the people most affected by our criminal justice system have a say in how it operates. Wouldn't you want to have a say in what happens in your life? I urge you to support this bill, not just for the 16,000 Marylanders currently affected but for the principle that democracy should include everyone. We cannot continue to allow incarceration to be a means of silencing an entire population. Our voices matter! Our votes matter! And it is time for Maryland to recognize that. The values of freedom, respect for human rights and the public principle of holding periodic and



genuinely representative elections through universal suffrage are essential elements of democracy. No matter where you are in life, you deserve to have that.

Thank You ,  
Melody Mitchell