



February 9, 2026

The Honorable Melissa Wells  
Chair, House Government Labor and Elections  
Maryland House of Delegates  
Lowe House Office Building  
Annapolis, MD 21401

The Honorable Brian J. Feldman  
Chair, Senate Education, Energy, and Environment  
Maryland State Senate  
Miller Senate Office Building  
Annapolis, MD 21401

**RE: House Bill 52 /Senate Bill 89 - Voting Rights for All Act**

Dear Chair Wells and Chair Feldman:

We, the undersigned national and local faith, civil rights, and criminal legal reform organizations, urge your support for House Bill 52 / Senate Bill 89, Voting Rights for All Act. **House Bill 52/Senate Bill 89 is grounded in fundamental American values: redemption, responsibility, and representation.** The National Voting in Prison Coalition supports the passage of House Bill 52/Senate Bill 89 to guarantee the voting rights for all eligible Marylanders completing a felony sentence in federal, state, and local elections.

As Maryland begins to consider rights restoration for incarcerated people completing a felony sentence, we encourage you to assess the importance of a true representative democracy, where we all have a fair say in the decisions that shape the lives of our children and families. Americans have seen how our nation's prison system has been used to silence the voices of millions of Americans at the ballot box. According to The Sentencing Project, more than [16,000 Marylanders](#) are currently disenfranchised due to criminal convictions in Maryland. It is time to give these Americans a voice in our democracy.<sup>1</sup>

House Bill 52/Senate Bill 89 serves as a beacon of hope for Maryland's most silenced populations currently disenfranchised due to criminal convictions. These individuals, despite being most impacted by the criminal legal system, remain voiceless in our nation's electoral process. [Polling](#) by The Sentencing Project, Stand Up America, Common Cause, and State Innovation Exchange revealed that most Americans believe the right to vote should be an inalienable right for all Americans, extending to those who are currently serving sentences, both within and outside of prison walls.

House Bill 52/Senate Bill 89 is a long-overdue step towards fulfilling the promise of our democracy, where every American has a voice and a stake in shaping our nation's future. The National Voting in Prison Coalition and allies urges members of the House and Senate to join us in supporting this essential legislation and ensuring that all Americans can participate fully in our democratic processes.

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<sup>1</sup> Dider-Jollie, R., & Budd, K. M., Ph.D. (2025, March 5). *Why we must restore voting rights to over 16,000 Marylanders* (Fact sheet). The Sentencing Project. <https://www.sentencingproject.org/fact-sheet/why-we-must-restore-voting-rights-to-over-16000-marylanders/>

House Bill 52/Senate Bill 89 comprises a series of transformative measures designed to eradicate disenfranchisement and empower marginalized communities, including:

- Expansion of voting rights to Marylanders completing their sentences inside prison;
- Establishment of a Voting Rights Ombudsman for incarcerated people within the State Board of Elections to oversee the implementation and make recommendations to assist in facilitating voting by incarcerated individuals.
- Creation of a toll-free voter hotline for people in prison to receive information about voting, request voting materials, and report voting rights violations.

House Bill 52/Senate Bill 89 represents a bold step towards a more just and equitable society, where the right to vote is not a privilege reserved for a select few but a fundamental right guaranteed to all Americans. By dismantling the barriers that bar tens of thousands of Marylanders from participating in our democracy, we can move closer to realizing the true essence of American democracy – a system of government that truly represents the will of all its people.

### **Ending Felony Disenfranchisement Would Serve Reentry and Public Safety**

There is ample reason to believe that expanding the right to vote to incarcerated persons completing their felony sentence would benefit Maryland. Scholar Alec Ewald has argued that permitting people to vote while incarcerated would actually strengthen our democracy by expressing “confidence in the robust nature of our elections and the inclusiveness of our political values.”<sup>2</sup> Given that 95% of people serving sentences in Maryland’s prisons are ultimately released,<sup>3</sup> state law should encourage voting as a means of education, rehabilitation, and reentry. According to Ewald, participating in “elections—our proud, formative civic rituals—could help returning citizens develop their sense of social responsibility and membership in the political community.”<sup>4</sup>

Enfranchising people convicted of crimes is also a vital step toward ensuring the safety of Maryland’s communities. Research shows that “former criminal offenders who enter stable work and family relationships are most likely to desist from crime.”<sup>5</sup> This is because once an individual with a criminal record rejoins the community—through gainful employment, payment of taxes, and resumption of full family duties—he or she becomes accountable to the other members of that community. Any and all duties that help him or her fully reintegrate will motivate that individual to further engage in community-based activity and away from unlawful conduct. Assuming responsibilities of a “voting member of one’s community would appear to be a logical analog to work and family reintegration.”<sup>6</sup>

Research supports that [restoring voting rights for people with felony convictions can improve public safety](#). . A 2004 study controlling for factors like race and gender found that “among former arrestees, about 27% of the non-voters were re-arrested, relative to 12% of the voters.”<sup>7</sup> It concluded that “there is at least some correlation between voting and recidivism . . . among people who have had some official contact with the criminal justice system.”<sup>8</sup> Another study found that “individuals who are released in states that permanently disenfranchise are roughly nineteen percent *more likely* to

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<sup>2</sup> Ewald, *supra* note 6, at 11.

<sup>3</sup> Maryland Alliance for Justice Reform. Legislator’s Guide to the Maryland Criminal Justice System (2023).

<https://www.ma4jr.org/initiatives-2023/#:~:text=Reentry%20coordination..before%20and%20immediately%20after%20release>

<sup>4</sup> Ewald, *supra* note 6, at 11; see also Note, *The Disenfranchisement of Ex-Felons: Citizenship, Criminality, and “the Purity of the Ballot Box,”* 102 HARV. L. REV. 1300, 1309 (1989) (“[R]epublicanism seeks to nurture civic virtue in its citizens, and is premised on e notion that political participation is the path to moral growth.”).

<sup>5</sup> Christopher Uggen & Jeff Manza, *Voting and Subsequent Crime and Arrest: Evidence from a Community Sample*, 36 COLUM. HUM. RTS. L. REV. 193, 197 (2004-2005) (citing Robert Sampson & John Laub, *Crime and Deviance over the Life Course: The Saliency of Adult Social Bonds*, 55 AM. SOC. REV. 609, 617-618 (1990); Cristopher Uggen, *Work as a Turning Point in the Life Course of Criminals: A Duration Model of Age, Employment, and Recidivism*, 65 AM. SOC. REV. 529, 542 (2000)); John Laub et al., *Trajectories of Change in Criminal Offending: Good Marriages and the Desistance Process*, 63 AM. SOC. REV. 225, 237 (1998).

<sup>6</sup> Uggen & Manza, *supra* note 15, at 197.

<sup>7</sup> *Id.* at 205.

<sup>8</sup> *Id.* at 206.

be rearrested than those released in states that restore the franchise post-release. This finding provides initial evidence consistent with the thesis that disenfranchisement is directly related to recidivism.”<sup>9</sup>

Plainly, restricting those with felony convictions from voting does nothing to improve the safety of neighborhoods. Restoring the right to vote to those who are currently serving sentences, however, would help educate and prepare these individuals for full re-entry. Registering to vote and casting a ballot would engage their responsibilities as citizens, ultimately resulting in stronger, safer communities in which members do right by one another. In this way, ending felony disenfranchisement promises to help create law-abiding citizens.

As leaders entrusted with shaping Maryland’s future, you have a rare opportunity to reaffirm your faith in the power of redemption, civic duty, and representative government. Voting is how we teach the values of responsibility, community, and accountability. It’s how we ensure every voice counts—especially those working hardest to rejoin society and give back.

This is not about being soft on crime—it’s about being smart on rehabilitation and ensuring every Marylander has a stake in their community’s future.

Thank you for your consideration of these critical steps towards an inclusive democracy. We urge a favorable report on **House Bill 52/Senate Bill 89**. To discuss the National Voting in Prison Coalition or its support of **House Bill 52/Senate Bill 89**, please contact Nicole D. Porter, Senior Director of Advocacy with The Sentencing Project, at [nporter@sentencingproject.org](mailto:nporter@sentencingproject.org).

**About the National Voting in Prison Coalition**

*National Voting in Prison Coalition (NVPC) is a coalition of national and state organizations working to support national, state, and local campaigns to guarantee voting rights to persons completing their sentence inside and outside of prison and subjected to felony disenfranchisement. The NVPC’s advocacy supports strategies to guarantee political rights for justice-impacted residents through expanding automatic voter registration policies to include prisons, jails, and probation and parole offices. NVPC members also work to guarantee ballot access for eligible voters in local correctional facilities to support and facilitate jail and prison voter registration and voting initiatives.*

Sincerely,

Asbury United Methodist Church-DC  
Baltimore-Washington Conference of The United Methodist Church  
Campaign Legal Center  
Dēmos  
EDC- Empowering Descendant Communities to Unlock Democracy  
EXPO Wisconsin  
Formerly Incarcerated, Convicted People & Families Movement (FICPFM)  
Full Citizens Coalition  
Greater Baltimore Urban League  
Human Rights Watch  
Indivisible HoCo  
League of Women Voters of Maryland  
Legal Action Center  
Maryland League of Conservation Voters

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<sup>9</sup> Guy Padraic Hamilton-Smith & Matt Vogel, *The Violence of Voicelessness: The Impact of Felony Disenfranchisement on Recidivism*, 22 BERKELEY LA RAZA L.J. 407, 426 (2015) (emphasis added).

Millions for Prisoners New Mexico  
More Than Our Crimes  
NACDL  
National Council of Jewish Women, Maryland  
Nolef Turns Inc  
Oregon Justice Resource Center  
Out For Justice Inc  
Pure Justice Action Fund  
Ranked Choice Voting Maryland  
St. Mary's County NAACP  
The Change Up Midnight Coalition  
The Sentencing Project  
Vermont Citizens United for the Rehabilitation of Errants  
Voice of the Experienced (V.O.T.E.)

cc:

Members of the House Government Labor and Elections Committee

Members of the Senate Education, Energy, and Environment Committee