



TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SENATE BILL 241

**Election Law - Individuals Released From State Correctional Facilities - Automatic
Restoration of Voter Registration**

TO: Chair, Vice Chair, and members of the Committee

FROM: **Gwendolyn Levi**, Member of Out For Justice

DATE: February 11, 2026

My name is Ms. Gwendolyn Levi, and I am a justice-impacted individual and a **member of Out For Justice**, a Maryland-based organization led by formerly incarcerated people working to advance dignity, equity, and full civic participation. I served 16 years of an original 400-month federal sentence for conspiracy to distribute, including nine years housed in Maryland at the Maryland Correctional Institution for Women in Jessup.

While incarcerated, many of us followed legislation closely because decisions made by this body affected nearly every aspect of our lives—inside the facility and after release. We organized, wrote letters, contacted our families, and advocated for change. Despite that civic engagement, there was one fundamental right we were denied: **the right to vote and to fully participate in our democracy**.

The right to vote is foundational. Yet thousands of Marylanders who have served their sentences remain disconnected from the democratic process due to unnecessary and avoidable bureaucratic barriers. Although Maryland law was changed in 2016 to restore voting rights automatically upon release from incarceration for a felony conviction, meaningful access to voter registration has not been guaranteed in practice.

Currently, individuals serving felony sentences are removed from the voter rolls, and while the State Board of Elections is notified when someone becomes ineligible, there is no parallel, automatic process to ensure that voter registration is restored when eligibility returns. Although legislation passed in 2021 requires that a paper voter registration form be included in release packets, this step alone has not been sufficient to ensure returning citizens are registered or even aware that their rights have been restored.

SB 241 goes further and addresses this gap. The bill would require the State Board of Elections to use existing secure processes to restore the voter registration of eligible individuals released from Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services facilities who were previously registered, or to process new registrations when appropriate. By requiring weekly data sharing from DPSCS, SB 241 ensures that voter registration restoration is timely, accurate, and reliable.

Since my release in 2020, I have worked with organizations including Out For Justice and the Maryland Justice Project to educate and register returning citizens across the state. Many people I've encountered did not know their voting rights had been restored, or did not



understand how to re-register. SB 241 would remove confusion, reduce administrative barriers, and make civic participation a standard part of successful reentry.

Civic engagement is a proven factor in successful reentry. Research shows that people who vote and engage in their communities are less likely to reoffend and more likely to build stable, connected lives. When returning citizens are welcomed back as full participants in our democracy, our communities are stronger.

Voting is the most essential form of political expression in a democratic society. **SB 241 ensures that returning citizens know their rights, have their registrations restored, and are able to meaningfully participate in Maryland's elections.**

I respectfully urge a **favorable report on SB 241**. Thank you for your time and consideration.