

**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SENATE BILL 241**  
**Election Law - Individuals Released From State Correctional Facilities - Automatic  
Restoration of Voter Registration**  
*Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee*  
**February 11, 2026**

**Social Work Advocates for Social Change strongly supports SB 241**, which would restore active voter registration status to formerly incarcerated Marylanders immediately upon release from Maryland correctional facilities. It would require the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services to inform the State Board of Elections (SBE) of Marylanders released each week, so the SBE can then restore their voter registration, update their address, and notify them of their registration and eligibility to vote.

**SB 241 advances the legislature's previous work to restore voting rights.** In 2015, the Maryland General Assembly overwhelmingly supported House Bill 980, which qualified formerly incarcerated people to vote immediately upon reentry and instantly restored the right to vote for approximately 40,000 Marylanders.<sup>1,2</sup> Passing SB 241 continues Maryland's leadership as a state that allows and encourages *every* individual to understand and participate in the systems that govern them.

**SB 241 helps address the needs and realities of Marylanders impacted by incarceration by automatically re-connecting them to their previous civic engagement.** Our position as social work graduate students gives us unique insight into the lived realities of incarceration and reentry. Through our practicum placements, we observe systems up close, hearing directly from the people most affected by public policy. One of our coalition members, who served women through the TAMAR (Trauma, Addiction, Mental Health & Recovery) Program at the Baltimore County Detention Center, witnessed firsthand the conditions under which individuals were incarcerated – and later released – that were often inhumane and destabilizing. Many individuals left the correctional facility without meeting with a social worker, without access to their Social Security information, without financial resources, without stable housing, and often without the voter registration packet the State is required to provide. When someone is released with no phone, transportation, ID, or housing, voter registration understandably falls to the bottom of the priority list. At the same time, civic participation is one of the strongest indicators of successful reintegration and reduced recidivism.<sup>3</sup>

**SB 241 ensures that former voters return home as active voters** by removing an unnecessary administrative barrier without requiring them to navigate yet another bureaucratic process during an already overwhelming moment of transition.<sup>4</sup> For individuals whose basic needs are not yet met, automatic restoration is more than administrative efficiency: it is trauma-informed practice.<sup>5</sup> It acknowledges the realities of reentry and ensures the State fulfills its responsibility to preserve access to rights it has already restored.

**Inviting formerly incarcerated Marylanders back into political participation also serves as an invitation back into the community.** Many individuals reentering society have endured profound dehumanization. Our coalition members have witnessed incarcerated individuals be subjected to strip searches, misuse of pepper spray, sleeping on uncleaned one-inch foam mats, and denial of toilet paper or menstrual products. Demonstrating that this community is welcomed, valued, and equally deserving of civic participation is one of the most effective therapeutic tools we can offer.<sup>6</sup> Their voices matter, and a system that claims to support rehabilitation must allow space for those voices to shape the world they return to. Labeling people as “other” only undermines reintegration; restoring full civic belonging strengthens it.

**SB 241 is also transformative as it reflects the national momentum seen across the country, with states like Michigan, New York, Ohio, and Pennsylvania,** which have passed legislation that implements automatic voter registration.<sup>7</sup> These states have seen similar legislation boost both the belief that one's voice matters, and their confidence in participating in their government.

Maryland must not stop at simply qualifying formerly incarcerated people to vote, but rather move towards establishing automatic processes that connect and reconnect Marylanders to civic engagement, like proposed in SB 241. As such, **Social Work Advocates for Social Change urges a favorable report on SB 241.**

*Social Work Advocates for Social Change is a coalition of MSW students at the University of Maryland School of Social Work that seeks to promote equity and justice through public policy, and to engage the communities impacted by public policy in the policymaking process.*

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<sup>1</sup> Brennan Center for Justice. (2020). *Voting rights restoration efforts in Maryland*. Brennan Center for Justice. <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/voting-rights-restoration-efforts-maryland>

<sup>2</sup> Election Law–Voting Rights–Ex-Felons, H.B. 980, Maryland General Assembly, (2015). [https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/2015RS/Chapters\\_noln/Ch\\_6\\_hb0980t.pdf](https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/2015RS/Chapters_noln/Ch_6_hb0980t.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Walker, H., Stewart, R., Libal, R. (2025). *Expanding Electoral Engagement Among Justice-Impacted People*. The Sentencing Project. <https://www.sentencingproject.org/policy-brief/expanding-electoral-engagement-among-justice-impacted-people/>

<sup>4</sup> Jackson-Gleich, G. & Yeary, S.T. (2020). *Eligible, but excluded: A guide to removing the barriers to jail voting*. Prison Policy Initiative. [https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/jail\\_voting.html](https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/jail_voting.html)

<sup>5</sup> Walker et al.

<sup>6</sup> Budd, K.M. & Monazzam, N. (2023). *Increasing Public Safety by Restoring Voting Rights*. The Sentencing Project. <https://www.sentencingproject.org/policy-brief/increasing-public-safety-by-restoring-voting-rights/>

<sup>7</sup> Congressional Black Caucus Foundation. (2024). *Unshackling the Vote: A New Chapter for Formerly Incarcerated Americans*. <https://www.cbcfinc.org/blog/unshackling-the-vote-a-new-chapter-for-formerly-incarcerated-americans>