

DRM Written Testimony FAV SB 89 VRAA BS.pdf

Uploaded by: Braden Stinar

Position: FAV



Empowering People to Lead Systemic Change

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DisabilityRightsMD.org

SENATE EDUCATION, ENERGY, ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE
Senate Bill 89: Election Law - Incarcerated Individuals - Voter
Hotline and Voting Eligibility (Voting Rights for All Act)
FEBRUARY 11, 2026
POSITION: SUPPORT

Disability Rights Maryland (DRM) is the federally-mandated Protection and Advocacy agency of Maryland, charged with defending and advancing the rights of people with disabilities. DRM submits this testimony in support of SB 89, which expands voting access by establishing a nonpartisan voter hotline for incarcerated individuals and restoring the right to vote for people currently serving felony sentences.

SB 89 restores voting rights to individuals currently incarcerated for felony convictions in Maryland. Approximately 16,000 people in the state are currently disenfranchised due to serving criminal sentences.¹This disenfranchisement disproportionately affects marginalized communities, including people with disabilities. Nationally, about 38% of incarcerated individuals have at least one disability.²Restoring voting rights is essential to ensuring that people with disabilities can fully participate in Maryland's electoral process.

In addition to restoring voting rights, SB 89 requires the State Board of Elections to establish a tollfree voter hotline for incarcerated individuals. This hotline will provide critical information about voter registration, requesting ballots, and reporting potential voting rights violations. For people with disabilities who are incarcerated, accessing information can often present barriers. Ensuring that the hotline and related election materials are accessible is essential to guarantee that all incarcerated voters, regardless of disability, can access information and exercise their right to vote independently. DRM recommends that accessibility standards for the created hotline be implemented. A staffed hotline, accessible via video relay for Deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals, would enhance usability for all voters who regain their right to vote under this legislation.

Without this legislation, individuals incarcerated for felony convictions—many of whom have disabilities—will continue to experience the temporary loss of

¹ <https://www.sentencingproject.org/fact-sheet/why-we-must-restore-voting-rights-to-over16000marylanders/>

² <https://bjs.ojp.gov/library/publications/disabilities-reported-prisoners-survey-prisoninmates-2016>

a fundamental right, followed by uncertainty about their ability to vote upon release. While Maryland automatically restores voting rights after incarceration, lack of awareness, administrative hurdles, and reintegration challenges disproportionately impact those with disabilities. The most effective approach is to ensure that individuals do not lose their voting rights during the conviction and sentencing process. Establishing an accessible hotline will provide critical support, giving eligible voters, including those impacted by incarceration, the resources they needed to begin participating in civic life again.

For these reasons, DRM requests a favorable report on Senate Bill 89.

Contact: Braden Stinar, Bradens@disabilityrightsmd.org or 443-692-2485

SB 89 Sponsor Testimony.pdf

Uploaded by: C. Anthony Muse

Position: FAV



THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

SPONSOR TESTIMONY

**SB 89: Election Law - Incarcerated Individuals - Voter Hotline and Voting Eligibility
(Voting Rights for All Act)**

Good afternoon, Chairman Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and members of the Senate Education, Energy, and Environment Committee.

Senate Bill 89, the *Voting Rights for All Act*, restores the right to vote for Maryland residents currently incarcerated for a felony by repealing the provision in State law that disqualifies individuals from voter registration while serving a court-ordered sentence of imprisonment. This bill also requires the State Board of Elections to establish a toll-free voter hotline for incarcerated individuals, ensuring they have access to essential election information. The cost of implementing this hotline is minimal, but the impact is immeasurable.

Currently, individuals in Maryland correctional facilities awaiting trial or serving sentences for misdemeanors retain their right to vote. In 2021, we took an important step toward ensuring access to the ballot for these individuals. My panelists, who supported that initiative, can explain how that process works and how we can build upon it by extending voting rights to those serving felony sentences.

I firmly believe that all Marylanders, regardless of criminal conviction, should maintain the unalienable right to vote. Voting should not be a privilege determined by who we deem good or bad; it is a fundamental right that should belong to all citizens of voting age. Our democracy is strongest when every voice is heard, including those who remain part of our communities despite incarceration. This bill recognizes that all Marylanders deserve a say in the policies and decisions that shape their lives.

Maryland has an opportunity to join states like Maine and Vermont in affirming that justice-involved individuals should not be stripped of their civic participation. Disenfranchisement disproportionately impacts communities of color and undermines rehabilitation and reintegration efforts. By ensuring access to the ballot, we reinforce the principles of democracy, accountability, and inclusion.

For these reasons, I strongly urge a favorable report on SB 89.

SB 89, Election Law, Incarcerated Individuals, Vot

Uploaded by: Carlos Orbe, Jr.

Position: FAV

February 9, 2026

The Honorable Brian J. Feldman

Chair, Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

2 West Miller Senate Office Building

Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: Support for SB 89, Election Law, Incarcerated Individuals, Voter Hotline and Voting Eligibility, Voting Rights for All Act

Dear Chair Feldman,

Maryland Latinos Unidos (MLU) is honored to express our strong support for Senate Bill 89, Election Law, Incarcerated Individuals, Voter Hotline and Voting Eligibility, Voting Rights for All Act, which is scheduled for a hearing in the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee on February 11, 2026.

Many Marylanders held in local detention settings remain legally eligible to vote, including people who are detained pretrial or serving sentences that do not disqualify them. Yet across the country, eligible voters in jail frequently face barriers to registration, ballot access, and accurate information about their rights. National research has documented that despite eligibility, people in jail often cannot vote because systems do not reliably provide the information and practical pathways needed to cast a ballot.

SB 89 addresses these barriers by improving access to clear information and practical assistance for incarcerated individuals, including the creation of a voter hotline and clearer processes tied to eligibility. This approach is aligned with Maryland's existing public information work on voting rights restoration and helps ensure that legal rights are meaningful in practice.

Implications for Latino and immigrant Marylanders

For justice impacted Latinos, SB 89 expands freedom and opportunity by strengthening civic participation and reducing the confusion that suppresses eligible voters. Civic exclusion compounds reentry barriers, increases distrust in public systems, and weakens community power in decisions that shape housing, education, and public safety. When Maryland ensures accurate information and reliable voting access, it supports accountability, representation, and a healthier democracy that includes families who are too often sidelined.

MLU can amplify the impact of SB 89 by partnering with reentry organizations, detention outreach programs, and legal services to distribute multilingual voting rights information, support eligible individuals with registration and mail in ballot requests, and ensure families understand eligibility rules so they can advocate for their loved ones.

MLU urges the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee to issue a favorable report on SB 89, affirming Maryland's commitment to a democracy that is accessible, accurate, and inclusive.

Sincerely,

Carlos Orbe, Jr.

Communications and Public Affairs Specialist

Maryland Latinos Unidos

corbejr@mdlatinosunidos.org

Supporting SB89.pdf

Uploaded by: CRISTINA BENAVIDES

Position: FAV

This bill would expand voting access and rights to incarcerated people who have every right to take part in our democracy.

Favorable Testimony SB-89 021126 Miller.pdf

Uploaded by: Cynthia Miller

Position: FAV

February 11, 2026

Testimony SB 89

Election Law - Incarcerated Individuals - Voter Hotline and Eligibility

(Voting Rights for All Act)

Government, Labor, Elections Committee

Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

Position: Favorable

As a lifelong resident of Maryland, and a pro-democracy activist in my work as co-lead of Third Act Maryland (an environmental and democracy focused organization of more than 1,000 Marylanders over 60), I strongly urge a favorable report for HB52/SB 89.

SB 89, the Voting Rights for All Act, expands voting access by establishing a voter hotline for incarcerated individuals and allowing people with felony convictions who are currently serving to vote. Throughout history, various discriminatory practices, such as literacy tests and strict voting requirements, have been implemented to suppress Black voters. By advancing **SB 89**, Maryland acknowledges this legacy and takes a significant step toward rectifying past injustices, ensuring that all citizens, regardless of their circumstances, have the opportunity to participate in the democratic process.

Too many Americans have seen how our nation's prison system is 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. Those who have finished serving a prison sentence for a felony need to take affirmative steps to register to vote. Many are unsure of their rights. They might know that being convicted of a felony affected their voting rights, but not the details: can they vote even if on probation? Do they need to take any additional steps to restore their voting rights? It would be much

simpler if someone returning from prison never lost their voting rights in the first place.

Denying the right to vote to those who are in prison is also problematic. Someone in prison is still part of society and has a voice that should be heard. Allowing and encouraging them to vote facilitates their return to life outside prison as a participating and engaged member of society. Punishment is meted out by a prison sentence and should not include suppressing a prisoner's voice.

SB 89 serves as a beacon of hope for Maryland's most silenced populations currently disenfranchised due to criminal convictions. Despite being most impacted by the criminal legal system, these individuals 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.

SB 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. Third Act Maryland and allies urge supporting this essential legislation and ensuring that all Americans can participate fully in our democratic processes.

SB 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;
- Establishes a toll-free voter hotline for people in prison to receive information about voting, request voting materials, and report voting rights violations.

SB 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.

Thank you for your consideration of this critical step towards an inclusive democracy. We urge a favorable report.

Respectfully submitted,

Cynthia Miller, Third Act Maryland Co-Facilitator, District 27

SB89 - Voting Rights for All.pdf

Uploaded by: Daryl Yoder

Position: FAV

Dear **Members of the Education, Energy and the Environment Committee,**

This testimony is being submitted by Showing Up for Racial Justice Baltimore, a group of individuals working to move white folks as part of a multi-racial movement for equity and racial justice in Baltimore City, Baltimore County, and Howard County. We are also working in collaboration with Out for Justice. I am a resident of District 44A. **I am testifying in support of SB089, the Voting Rights for All Act.**



Showing Up for Racial Justice

Americans have a long history of believing, without any real basis other than “gut instinct,” that being convicted of a crime makes you unsuited to the responsibilities of citizenship, including voting. But the idea that people who might “vote for the wrong people” should be barred from voting is deeply undemocratic. In addition, the historic over-prosecution of Black communities that leads to their over-representation in our prison populations has meant that this is the group most widely disenfranchised by laws which bar felons from voting. Over the past two decades, Maryland has taken important steps toward fixing these inequities: in 2007, the MGA passed legislation letting people convicted of felonies vote once their sentence was completed, and in 2016, that was expanded to include people who had completed any term of imprisonment. It is time for Maryland to take the final step and make sure that **every adult Marylander** has the ability to vote.

The Voting Rights for All Act would, first and foremost, re-enfranchise our fellow citizens who are serving sentences. It would also require the State Board of Elections to establish a voter hotline for incarcerated persons, to allow them to request information about voting and assist them in exercising their right to do so. This will ensure that despite not having free access to the internet and other resources, people who are incarcerated can still meaningfully exercise their right to vote. Any costs associated with the hotline should be at least partially offset by the costs saved when the Board of Elections no longer has to monitor criminal convictions across several courts and ensure people who are convicted of felonies are removed from the rolls.

Maryland should close the book on the racist legacy of felon disenfranchisement once and for all. It is for these reasons that I am encouraging you to vote **in support of SB089, the Voting Rights for All Act.**

Thank you for your time, service, and consideration.

Sincerely,
Daryl Yoder
309 Glenmore Ave.
Catonsville, MD 21228
Showing Up for Racial Justice Baltimore

SB89_Voting_Rights_4_All_Act_FAV_OFJ_GwenLevi.pdf

Uploaded by: Gwendolyn Levi

Position: FAV



TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SENATE BILL 89

**Election Law - Incarcerated Individuals - Voter Hotline and Voting Eligibility
(Voting Rights for All Act) SB 89**

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, I am a justice-impacted Marylander, and member of Out For Justice. I support Senate Bill 89.

I served 16 years of an original 400-month federal sentence for conspiracy to distribute. During that time, I spent nine years housed in Maryland at the Maryland Correctional Institution for Women in Jessup. Inside, many of us tracked legislation closely because decisions made in Annapolis shaped almost every part of our lives—health care, education, reentry preparation, family connection, and basic dignity. We organized, wrote letters, and advocated through the limited channels we had. But there was one essential tool of democracy we did not have: **the ability to vote.**

SB 89 fixes that. The bill would allow Marylanders who are incarcerated for felony convictions to **register to vote** by removing incarceration as a disqualification for voter registration. It also requires the State Board of Elections to create a **toll-free voter hotline for incarcerated individuals** so people can get accurate information, request election materials, and report voting-rights violations—developed in collaboration with DPSCS and correctional facilities.

Since my release in 2020, I have worked with organizations including Out For Justice, the Maryland Justice Project, and civic partners to educate and register returning citizens. Many people still don't realize that in Maryland, voting rights are restored upon release (and that people incarcerated for misdemeanors can vote). SB 89 would allow us to extend that same civic education to those still inside—so that when people return home, they return as engaged community members, not as permanent outsiders to democracy.

Supporters of this reform estimate that **more than 16,000 Marylanders** are currently disenfranchised due to criminal convictions, and SB 89 would be a major step toward ensuring our democracy includes everyone it governs.

Passing SB 89 would also move Maryland toward the small group of U.S. jurisdictions that do not strip voting rights because of incarceration—**Maine, Vermont, Puerto Rico, and Washington, DC**—and it would affirm that voting is a fundamental right, not a privilege reserved for the few.

I respectfully urge a **favorable report on SB 89**. Thank you for your time and consideration.

2026.02.11 FINAL LDF MD SB89 (Voting Rights for AI

Uploaded by: Imani Brooks

Position: FAV

February 11, 2026

Submitted Electronically

Brian J. Feldman, Chair
Cheryl C. Kagan, Vice Chair
Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
2 West Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

***RE: Senate Bill 89 – Election Law – Voter Hotline and Voting Eligibility
(Voting Rights for All Act)***

Chair Feldman and Vice Chair Kagan:

On behalf of the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF),¹ we appreciate the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of S.B. 89, a bill that would restore voting rights to individuals currently incarcerated for a felony and require the State Board of Elections to establish a toll-free hotline for incarcerated individuals to get information about voting. By enacting S.B. 89, Maryland can join the movement across the country to fully end the systemically racist practice of felony disenfranchisement. Ensuring that every eligible Marylander can vote, regardless of felony conviction status or where they are housed, is an important step toward eliminating the vestiges of Jim Crow and narrowing Maryland's persistent voter participation gaps.

I. The Legal Defense Fund's Long History of Protecting and Advancing Voting Rights

Founded in 1940 under the leadership of Maryland native Thurgood Marshall, LDF is America's premier law organization fighting for racial justice. Through litigation, advocacy, and public education, LDF seeks structural changes to build a more inclusive democracy, eliminate disparities, and achieve racial justice in a society that fulfills the promise of equality for all.

¹ Since its founding in 1940, LDF has used litigation, policy advocacy, public education, and community organizing strategies to achieve racial justice and equity in the areas of education, economic justice, political participation, and criminal justice. It has been a separate organization from the NAACP since 1957.

LDF has prioritized its work protecting the right of Black communities to vote for more than 85 years—representing Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and other marchers in Selma, Alabama in 1965, advancing the passage of the Voting Rights Act (VRA), litigating seminal cases interpreting the federal VRA’s scope,² and working in communities across the South to strengthen and protect the ability of Black voters to participate in the political process free from discrimination.

LDF’s political participation work has included advocacy for the restoration of voting rights for formerly incarcerated persons in Alabama, Florida, and other places in the South.³ For example, LDF and allies challenged a Florida law that required all legal financial obligations to be paid before a person with a felony conviction could vote.⁴ Parts of the law were struck down by a lower court, but on September 11, 2020, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eleventh Circuit overturned the decision, leading to LDF’s extensive advocacy to ensure that as many of the 85,000 vulnerable voters could actually vote.⁵ Today, LDF is advocating for the protection of returning citizens from unfair prosecutions with the Harry T. and Harriette V. Moore Florida Voting Rights Act, which would create a centralized database for people with prior convictions to determine their voter eligibility.⁶

II. The Importance of Rights Restoration for Currently Incarcerated People in Maryland

The nation’s antiquated and discriminatory felony disenfranchisement laws were adopted and proliferated in the late 19th century and during the era of Jim Crow to bar newly freed Black citizens from exercising their right to vote based on felony crimes that were disproportionately prosecuted against them.⁷ To this day, the burden of disenfranchisement based on contact with the criminal legal system continues to disproportionately impact Black voters.⁸

The racist history of felony disenfranchisement laws from the Jim Crow era is reflected in current reality in Maryland, where more than two-thirds of the state’s

² See e.g. *Louisiana v. Callais*, 606 U.S. ____ (2025); *Allen v. Milligan*, 599 U.S. 1 (2023).

³ LDF Thurgood Marshall Institute, *Democracy Defended* (2020), https://www.naacpldf.org/wp-content/uploads/LDF_2020_DemocracyDefended-1-3.pdf.

⁴ *Jones v. DeSantis*, 462 F. Supp. 3d 1196, 1205 (N.D. Fla.), rev’d and vacated sub nom. *Jones v. Governor of Fla.*, 975 F.3d 1016 (11th Cir. 2020).

⁵ See LDF Thurgood Marshall Institute, *supra* note 3; *Jones*, 462 F. Supp. 3d at 1205.

⁶ See Florida Needs Its Own Voting Rights Act, LDF, <https://www.naacpldf.org/case-issue/florida-voting-rights-act/>.

⁷ See generally NAACP LDF, *Free the Vote: Unlocking Democracy in the Cells and on the Streets*, available at <https://www.naacpldf.org/wp-content/uploads/Free-the-Vote.pdf>.

⁸ See, e.g., Christopher Uggen et al., *Locked Out 2022: Estimates of People Denied Voting Rights*, THE SENTENCING PROJECT (Oct. 25, 2022), <https://www.sentencingproject.org/reports/locked-out-2022-estimates-of-people-denied-voting-rights/>.

incarcerated population is Black.⁹ And while Maryland has made substantial progress in making voting more equitable and accessible, substantial racial disparities in voter participation persist. For example, in the 2022 elections, turnout for white Marylanders was almost ten points higher than for Black residents, and 20 points higher than for Latine voters.¹⁰ Research from the Brennan Center for Justice shows that Maryland ranked second in the nation in 2022 for the number of Black voters who did not vote but would have if turnout rates were equal between Black and white Marylanders.¹¹ In other words, due to Maryland’s significant Black population, its racial turnout disparities are distorting its electorate to sharply reduce Black political power.

Democracy demands that the right to vote, a “fundamental political right” that is “preservative of all rights,” be made available to all eligible individuals on an equal basis.¹² All other rights, as the Supreme Court has memorably declared, “are illusory if the right to vote is undermined.”¹³ In light of these principles, Maryland should do everything in its power to ensure that more, not fewer, Marylanders can exercise the fundamental right to vote.

Enacting S.B. 89 would finally and fully end the systemically racist practice of disenfranchising thousands of Marylanders based on a criminal conviction and their incarcerated status. Full enfranchisement would make Maryland a national leader on voting rights of all citizens, regardless of criminal conviction status, and would facilitate the electoral participation of thousands of Marylanders, especially among historically marginalized communities.¹⁴ The impact will be especially significant for Black Marylanders, who make up two-thirds of the state’s

⁹ DOC Data Dashboard, MARYLAND.GOV, https://www.dpscs.state.md.us/community_releases/DOC-Annual-Data-Dashboard.shtml (last visited Mar. 25, 2024).

¹⁰ Press Release, U.S. Census Bureau, Voting and Registration in the Election of November 2022 tbl. 4b (Reported Voting and Registration of the Total Voting-Age Population, by Sex, Race and Hispanic Origin, for States: November 2022 [<1.0 MB]) (Apr. 2023), <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/voting-and-registration/p20-586.html>.

¹¹ Kevin Morris & Coryn Grange, *Growing Racial Disparities in Voter Turnout, 2008–2022*, Brennan Ctr. for Just., N.Y.U. L. (Mar. 2, 2024), <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/growing-racial-disparities-voter-turnout-2008-2022>.

¹² *See Yick Wo v. Hopkins*, 118 U.S. 356, 370 (1886).

¹³ *Wesberry v. Sanders*, 376 U.S. 1, 17 (1964).

¹⁴ Restoration of Voting Rights for Felons, National Conference of State Legislatures (Aug. 19, 2025), <https://www.ncsl.org/elections-and-campaigns/felon-voting-rights>. (With S.B. 89, Maryland would only pale in comparison to the District of Columbia, Vermont, and Maine, where people with felony convictions never lose their right to vote.)

incarcerated population whose voices have been silenced by the state’s antiquated Jim Crow disenfranchisement laws.¹⁵

For the reasons outlined above, LDF urges your Committee to issue a favorable report for S.B. 89. We stand ready to work with you to enfranchise and protect Black voters, and other voters of color, in the Free State.

Please feel free to contact Imani Brooks at (929) 697-3794 or ibrooks@naacpldf.org with any questions or to discuss S.B. 89 in more detail.

Sincerely,

/s/ Imani Brooks

Imani Brooks

Policy Counsel

NAACP Legal Defense & Educational Fund, Inc.

700 14th Street N.W., Ste. 600

Washington, DC 20005

NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc.

Since its founding in 1940, LDF has used litigation, policy advocacy, public education, and community organizing strategies to achieve racial justice and equity in education, economic justice, political participation, and criminal justice. Throughout its history, LDF has worked to enforce and promote laws and policies that increase access to the electoral process and prohibit voting discrimination, intimidation, and suppression. LDF has been fully separate from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (“NAACP”) since 1957, though LDF was originally founded by the NAACP and shares its commitment to equal rights.

¹⁵ DOC Data Dashboard, MARYLAND.GOV, https://www.dpscs.state.md.us/community_releases/DOC-Annual-Data-Dashboard.shtml (last visited Mar. 25, 2024).

SB89.pdf

Uploaded by: Jennifer Nance

Position: FAV

SB89
The Voting Rights For All Act
February 11 at 2 pm
Support (FAV)

Dear Senator Feldman and the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee,

My name is Jenny Nance and I live in Baltimore City, in District 43A. I support this bill because I believe that all citizens should have the right to vote. We cannot live in a society that has a hope of being just if people are denied the opportunity to have a voice in our electoral system. This includes individuals who are incarcerated—everyone deserves a chance to vote and this bill would support opportunities to accomplish this end.

I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report on SB89.

SB 89 - Election Law - Incarcerated Individuals –

Uploaded by: Joanne Antoine

Position: FAV

February 11, 2026

Testimony on SB 89
Election Law - Incarcerated Individuals – Voter Hotline and Voting Eligibility
(Voting Rights for All Act)
Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

Position: Favorable

Common Cause Maryland supports SB 89 which aims to end felony disenfranchisement in Maryland, restoring the right to vote to citizens who are currently incarcerated and convicted of a felony.

Felony disenfranchisement laws prohibit people with felony convictions from voting in elections. These restrictions have been a part of U.S. law since the inception of our nation. These laws are antiquated and have a disgraceful past. They not only have a disproportionate impact on communities of color and low-income communities but also have no criminal deterrent or rehabilitative value.

We believe that our government should work for everyone but, unfortunately, democracy has been susceptible to bias and discrimination since its founding. Felony disenfranchisement was designed to weaken the voting power of communities of color and when combined with criminal laws that are designed to target Black people - we have left most Black citizens unable to express their grievances at the ballot box.

Before the Civil War, most states had some form of disenfranchisement laws on the books, but the laws were narrow and applied to a few select crimes. However, after the Civil War — and after the passing of the 15 Amendment which gave Black men the right to vote — new disenfranchisement laws were significantly broader, extending to all felonies. Use of punitive disenfranchisement laws became common practice in the states, including here in Maryland where we most were permanently denied the right to vote until 1974 where some who completed their sentence and not under supervision were allowed to vote. But we've made much progress since then — restoring the right to vote for all returning citizens even if under supervision, unless guilty of vote buying and selling.

Maryland has already taken steps to provide access to voting for currently eligible incarcerated voters and is well positioned to be the first state in the country, outside of Washington DC, to put an end to felony disenfranchisement — joining Maine and Vermont where their state constitution guarantee voting rights for all citizens.

Maryland has already restored the right to vote for returning citizens and in 2021, created a program to provide individuals who are on pretrial or convicted of a misdemeanor access to voting materials and mail-in voting. The Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services (DPSCS) went beyond these requirements and worked with the State Board of Elections (SBE) to place secure drop boxes in prisons throughout the state as well as partnering with advocates to make digital nonpartisan voter guides available to eligible voters as well as advertisement about the upcoming elections that play regularly on televisions inside the correctional facilities. All these current processes can remain in place even with a large pool of eligible voters in the facilities. The voter hotline will ensure incarcerated voters have a process for asking questions about the elections and reporting issues.

Felony disenfranchisement holds us back as a democratic society. Maryland is well positioned to eliminate the process by which an individual convicted of a felony loses the right to vote. Many countries fully recognize the right of incarcerated citizens to vote. Over 26 European nations at least partially protect their incarcerated citizens' right to vote, while 18 countries grant people in prison the vote regardless of the offense. In Germany, Norway, and Portugal, only crimes that specifically target the "integrity of the state" or "constitutionally protected democratic order" result in disenfranchisement.

The Maryland General Assembly taking action to secure the freedom to vote for all, including those who have been marginalized or silenced in our unjust criminal legal system, sends a message to the nation that we are committed to enriching our democracy and ensuring that all perspectives are heard and considered in the decision-making process.

We urge a favorable report.

SB89 - favorable - John Ford.pdf

Uploaded by: John Ford

Position: FAV

Dear **Members of the Education, Energy and the Environment Committee,**

This testimony is being submitted in cooperation with Showing Up for Racial Justice Baltimore and Out for Justice. I am a resident of **District 46**. I am resident in Baltimore City and a workforce development and industrial and organizational psychology professional. I believe, professionally, spiritually, and philosophically, in the opportunity for full rehabilitation and reintegration for all citizens, even those who have committed terrible acts in their past. **I am testifying in support of SB089, the Voting Rights for All Act.**

Americans have a long history of believing, without any real basis other than “gut instinct,” that being convicted of a crime makes you unsuited to the responsibilities of citizenship, including voting. But the idea that people who might “vote for the wrong people” should be barred from voting is deeply undemocratic. In addition, the historic over-prosecution of Black communities that leads to their over-representation in our prison populations has meant that this is the group most widely disenfranchised by laws which bar felons from voting. Over the past two decades, Maryland has taken important steps toward fixing these inequities: in 2007, the MGA passed legislation letting people convicted of felonies vote once their sentence was completed, and in 2016, that was expanded to include people who had completed any term of imprisonment. It is time for Maryland to take the final step and make sure that **every adult Marylander** has the ability to vote.

The Voting Rights for All Act would, first and foremost, re-enfranchise our fellow citizens who are serving sentences. It would also require the State Board of Elections to establish a voter hotline for incarcerated persons, to allow them to request information about voting and assist them in exercising their right to do so. This will ensure that despite not having free access to the internet and other resources, people who are incarcerated can still meaningfully exercise their right to vote. Any costs associated with the hotline should be at least partially offset by the costs saved when the Board of Elections no longer has to monitor criminal convictions across several courts and ensure people who are convicted of felonies are removed from the rolls.

Maryland should close the book on the racist legacy of felon disenfranchisement once and for all. It is for these reasons that I am encouraging you to vote **in support of SB089, the Voting Rights for All Act.**

Thank you for your time, service, and consideration.

Sincerely,
John Preston Ford
529 S East Ave
Baltimore, MD 21224

Testimony in Support of SB089_Blaha_SURJ.pdf

Uploaded by: Katherine Blaha

Position: FAV

Monday, February 9, 2026



Showing Up for Racial Justice

Dear Members of the Education, Energy and the Environment Committee,

I am submitting this testimony as a member of Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ) Baltimore, a group of individuals working to mobilize white people in a multi-racial movement for equity and racial justice in Baltimore City, Baltimore County, and Howard County. We are also working in collaboration with Out for Justice, which advocates for the reform of policies and practices that adversely affect incarcerated people's successful reintegration into society. I am a resident of Baltimore City and District 41. I am testifying in **support of SB089, the Voting Rights for All Act.**

Some Americans have been inaccurately shaped to believe that being convicted of a crime makes a citizen undeserving of the rights of citizenship, including voting. But the idea that any citizen should be barred from voting is deeply undemocratic.

In addition, the historic and ongoing over-prosecution of Black communities that leads to their over-representation in American prison populations has meant that this is the group most widely disenfranchised by laws that bar previously incarcerated people from voting.

Over the past two decades, Maryland has taken important steps toward fixing these systemic and troubling inequities. In 2007, the MGA passed legislation letting people convicted of felonies vote once their sentence was completed, and in 2016, that was expanded to include people who had completed any term of imprisonment. It is long past time for Maryland to take the final step and make sure that **every adult Marylander** has the ability to vote.

The Voting Rights for All Act would, first and foremost, re-enfranchise our fellow citizens who are serving sentences. It would also require the State Board of Elections to establish a voter hotline for incarcerated persons to allow them to request information about voting and assist them in exercising their right to do so. This would ensure that despite not

having free access to the internet and other resources, people who are incarcerated can still meaningfully exercise their right to vote. Any costs associated with the hotline will be at least partially offset by the costs saved when the Board of Elections no longer has to monitor criminal convictions across several courts and ensure people who are convicted of felonies are removed from the rolls.

Maryland should close the book on the racist legacy of felon disenfranchisement once and for all. It is for these reasons that I am encouraging you to vote **in support of SB089, the Voting Rights for All Act.**

Thank you for your time, service, and consideration.

Sincerely,
Dr. Katherine Blaha
Baltimore, MD 21209
Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ) Baltimore

SB89 - Voting Rights for All.docx.pdf

Uploaded by: Katherine Wilkins

Position: FAV

Dear **Members of the Education, Energy and the Environment Committee,**

This testimony is being submitted by Showing Up for Racial Justice Baltimore, a group of individuals working to move white folks as part of a multi-racial movement for equity and racial justice in Baltimore City, Baltimore County, and Howard County. We are also working in collaboration with Out for Justice. I am a resident of **12A. I am testifying in support of SB089, the Voting Rights for All Act.**



Showing Up for Racial Justice

Americans have a long history of believing, without any real basis other than “gut instinct,” that being convicted of a crime makes you unsuited to the responsibilities of citizenship, including voting. But the idea that people who might “vote for the wrong people” should be barred from voting is deeply undemocratic. In addition, the historic over-prosecution of Black communities that leads to their over-representation in our prison populations has meant that this is the group most widely disenfranchised by laws which bar felons from voting. Over the past two decades, Maryland has taken important steps toward fixing these inequities: in 2007, the MGA passed legislation letting people convicted of felonies vote once their sentence was completed, and in 2016, that was expanded to include people who had completed any term of imprisonment. It is time for Maryland to take the final step and make sure that **every adult Marylander** has the ability to vote.

The Voting Rights for All Act would, first and foremost, re-enfranchise our fellow citizens who are serving sentences. It would also require the State Board of Elections to establish a voter hotline for incarcerated persons, to allow them to request information about voting and assist them in exercising their right to do so. This will ensure that despite not having free access to the internet and other resources, people who are incarcerated can still meaningfully exercise their right to vote. Any costs associated with the hotline should be at least partially offset by the costs saved when the Board of Elections no longer has to monitor criminal convictions across several courts and ensure people who are convicted of felonies are removed from the rolls.

Maryland should close the book on the racist legacy of felon disenfranchisement once and for all. It is for these reasons that I am encouraging you to vote **in support of SB089, the Voting Rights for All Act.**

Thank you for your time, service, and consideration.

Sincerely,

Katherine Wilkins

5605 Foxcroft Way

Columbia MD 21045

Showing Up for Racial Justice Baltimore

SB 89 pdf.pdf

Uploaded by: Lesley Frost

Position: FAV

SB 89 Election Law - Incarcerated Individuals - Voter Hotline and Voting Eligibility

Position - Favorable

February 9, 2026

To the Honorable Chair and Members of the Senate Education, Energy and Environment Committee

My name is Lesley Frost and I am the Chair of National Council of Jewish Women, Maryland State Policy Advocacy Committee (NCJW MD SPA) and I am writing on behalf of our 600 advocates across the state in support of SB 89 Election Law - Incarcerated Individuals - Voter Hotline and Voting Eligibility.

SB 89, part of the Voting Rights for All Act, expands voting access by establishing a voter hotline for incarcerated individuals and allowing people with felony convictions who are currently serving to vote. In Maryland, you lose your right to vote while you serve time in a state or federal correctional facility for a felony conviction. According to the Sentencing Project this means that 16,000 Marylanders lose their political voice, are banned from voting, while serving a prison or jail term for a felony conviction.

Of those who complete their sentences and become eligible to vote again many are unsure of their rights. They might know their conviction affected voting rights, but not the details: can they vote even if on probation? Do they need to take any additional steps to restore their voting rights? These uncertainties would vanish if someone returning from prison never lost their voting rights in the first place.

SB 89 comprises a series of transformative measures designed to eradicate disenfranchisement and empower marginalized communities, and 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.

SB89 also exemplifies NCJW's Resolution 1V.11 "Election laws, policies, and practices that ensure - without domestic or foreign interference - safe, easy and equitable access to the ballot and eliminate obstacles to the electoral process so that every vote counts and can be verified."

We urge you to support this essential legislation and ensure that all Americans can participate fully in our democratic processes.

Lesley Frost
Chair NCJW MD SPA, ncjw.mdacts@gmail.com

7707 Wisconsin Avenue
Bethesda MD 20814 lesleyfrost0@gmail.com

SB89 - Voting Rights for All.docx.pdf

Uploaded by: Lindsay Keipper

Position: FAV

Dear **Members of the Education, Energy and the Environment Committee,**

This testimony is being submitted by Showing Up for Racial Justice Baltimore, a group of individuals working to move white folks as part of a multi-racial movement for equity and racial justice in Baltimore City, Baltimore County, and Howard County. We are also working in collaboration with Out for Justice. I am a resident of **District 46 and I am testifying in support of SB089, the Voting Rights for All Act.**



Showing Up for Racial Justice

Americans have a long history of believing, without any real basis other than “gut instinct,” that being convicted of a crime makes you unsuited to the responsibilities of citizenship, including voting. But the idea that people who might “vote for the wrong people” should be barred from voting is deeply undemocratic. In addition, the historic over-prosecution of Black communities that leads to their over-representation in our prison populations has meant that this is the group most widely disenfranchised by laws which bar felons from voting. Over the past two decades, Maryland has taken important steps toward fixing these inequities: in 2007, the MGA passed legislation letting people convicted of felonies vote once their sentence was completed, and in 2016, that was expanded to include people who had completed any term of imprisonment. It is time for Maryland to take the final step and make sure that **every adult Marylander** has the ability to vote.

The Voting Rights for All Act would, first and foremost, re-enfranchise our fellow citizens who are serving sentences. It would also require the State Board of Elections to establish a voter hotline for incarcerated persons, to allow them to request information about voting and assist them in exercising their right to do so. This will ensure that despite not having free access to the internet and other resources, people who are incarcerated can still meaningfully exercise their right to vote. Any costs associated with the hotline should be at least partially offset by the costs saved when the Board of Elections no longer has to monitor criminal convictions across several courts and ensure people who are convicted of felonies are removed from the rolls.

Maryland should close the book on the racist legacy of felon disenfranchisement once and for all. It is for these reasons that I am encouraging you to vote **in support of SB089, the Voting Rights for All Act.**

Thank you for your time, service, and consideration.

Sincerely,

Lindsay Keipper

2425 Fleet St.

Baltimore, MD 21224

Showing Up for Racial Justice Baltimore

SB0089 - Written testimony in support.pdf

Uploaded by: Lindsey Sitz

Position: FAV

To members of the **Senate Energy, Education, and the Environment Committee,**

I am writing in as a constituent of Montgomery County in support of Senate Bill 0089 sponsored by Senator Muse. Every citizen should have the right to access their vote. I wholeheartedly support Senator Muse in his effort to set up a toll-free hotline for incarcerated people to learn about voting, as well as his effort to make voting registration accessible to incarcerated people. Right now we are witnessing democracy being encroached upon and rights being taken away from so many. It is vitally important to give all citizens *equal* access to the democratic process.

Thank you,
Lindsey Sitz

9213 Bradford Rd.
Silver Spring, MD 20901

WrTestimonySupportingSBElection Law - Incarcerated

Uploaded by: Lori Kronser

Position: FAV

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

Position: Favorable

Dear Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee,

My name is Lori Kronser. I am writing to urge a favorable report on SB 89 Election Law - Incarcerated Individuals - Voter Hotline and Eligibility (Voting Rights for All Act).

SB 89, the Voting Rights for All Act, expands voting access by establishing a voter hotline for incarcerated individuals and allowing people with felony convictions who are currently serving to vote. Throughout history, various discriminatory practices, such as literacy tests and strict voting requirements, have been implemented to suppress Black voters. By advancing SB 89, Maryland acknowledges this legacy and takes a significant step toward rectifying past injustices, ensuring that all citizens, regardless of their circumstances, have the opportunity to participate in the democratic process.

Too many Americans have seen how our nation's prison system is 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. Those who have finished serving a prison sentence for a felony need to take affirmative steps to register to vote. Many are unsure of their rights. They might know that being convicted of a felony affected their voting rights, but not the details: can they vote even if on probation? Do they need to take any additional steps to restore their voting rights? It would be much simpler if someone returning from prison never lost their voting rights in the first place.

Denying the right to vote to those who are in prison is also problematic. Someone in prison is still part of society and has a voice that should be heard. Allowing and encouraging them to vote facilitates their return to life outside prison as a participating and engaged member of society. Punishment is meted out by a prison sentence and should not include suppressing a prisoner's voice.

SB 89 serves as a beacon of hope for Maryland's most silenced populations currently disenfranchised due to criminal convictions. Despite being most impacted by the criminal legal system, these individuals 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.

SB 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. Showing Up for Racial Justice Annapolis and Anne Arundel County (SURJ3A) urges supporting this essential legislation and ensuring that all Americans can participate fully in our democratic processes.

SB 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;
- Establishes a toll-free voter hotline for people in prison to receive information about voting, request voting materials, and report voting rights violations.

SB 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.

Thank you for your consideration of this critical step towards an inclusive democracy. We urge a favorable report.

Sincerely,

Lori Kronser

12800 Holiday Lane

Bowie, MD 20716

SB89MTsiongas.pdf

Uploaded by: Magdalena Tsiongas

Position: FAV

TESTIMONY ON SB 89- VOTING RIGHTS FOR ALL ACT

Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

February 11, 2026

FAVORABLE

Submitted by: **Magdalena Tsiongas, MPH**

Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan and members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee:

I, Magdalena Tsiongas, am testifying in support of SB 89, 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 19 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, I have been 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, for example, signed a petition in support of the Second Look Act. 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 Black people, specifically and intentionally.

The right to vote should not be a negotiable one. Our neighbors in the District of Columbia can serve as a model to us, as the Restore the Vote Amendment Act allows District residents to vote while incarcerated whether in the DC Department of Corrections or the federal Bureau of Prisons.

SB 89 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 SB 89.

Thank you.

USE THIS Indivisible position on SB0089.pdf

Uploaded by: Marna Brown-Krausz

Position: FAV

**Testimony to the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
SB 0089 Voting Rights for All Act – Election Law – Incarcerated Individuals
– Voter Hotline and Voting Eligibility**

Bill Sponsor: Senator Muse

POSITION: FAVORABLE

By: Marna Brown-Krausz, Member: Defend Democracy Team, Indivisible HoCo

Date: February 11, 2025

On behalf of our 1700+ Indivisible Howard County members, I am writing in support of SB 0089, also known as the Voting Rights for All Act. This Bill modifies existing Sections of the Election Law. Indivisible HoCoMD is an informal group of citizens in Howard County, MD, registered with the Indivisible Project's national network of local grassroots groups. We believe in fairness, tolerance, inclusion, and democracy.

We believe this bill will strengthen the right to vote in Maryland by expanding voting access to citizen residents of Maryland who are incarcerated.

The bill requires the State Board of Elections to provide a toll-free voter hotline for incarcerated individuals to receive information about voting, request election-related materials, and report voting rights violations. The bill also requires the State Board of Elections, in collaboration with the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services and Correctional Facilities, to adopt regulations for the administration of the voter hotline. The bill further eliminates the exclusion of incarcerated individuals convicted of felonies from voting in a primary election in which candidates are nominated for a general or special election that will occur when the individual is at least 18 years of age.

We believe there is great support for this bill nationwide. Polling from The Sentencing Project, Stand Up America, Common Cause, and State Innovation Exchange reveal that most Americans believe the right to vote should be an inalienable right.

Indivisible Howard County urges a favorable report on HB 0089 and its House Bill counterpart, HB 0052.

Thank you for your consideration.

SB0089_HB0052_Voting_Rights_4_All_Act_FAV_OFJ_Mars

Uploaded by: Marsha Briley

Position: FAV



TESTIMONY IN **SUPPORT** OF SENATE BILL 89/ HOUSE BILL 52
**Election Law - Incarcerated Individuals -
Voter Hotline and Voting Eligibility (Voting Rights for All Act)
SB89/HB52**

TO: Chair, Vice Chair, and members of the Committee
FROM: **Marsha Briley-Savage**, Reentry Coordinator, Anne Arundel Government

Date: February 11, 2026

Position: SUPPORT

My name is **Marsha Briley-Savage**, and I am submitting this testimony in strong support of **HB0052/SB0089, the Voting Rights for All Act**. This legislation would expand voting eligibility to incarcerated Marylanders serving felony sentences and create a toll-free voter hotline to ensure meaningful access to voting information and materials for people behind bars.

Background and Professional Experience

My work advancing civic engagement for justice-impacted Marylanders began in 2016, when the Maryland General Assembly overrode the veto of SB 340/HB 980 to restore voting rights to more than 40,000 Marylanders. I ensured State Board of Elections training for all DPSCS Transition Specialists and required the Board's presence at Reentry Fairs so people nearing release could prepare to rejoin their communities as fully participating citizens.

As Reentry Coordinator for Anne Arundel County detention facilities, I have seen persistent barriers to voting access for justice-impacted individuals. Facilities prohibit internet access and mobile devices, making modern voter registration and information access nearly impossible without institutional support. Case managers often lack the training or bandwidth to consistently assist people in registering or accessing ballots.

HB0052/SB0089 would:

- **Restore voting eligibility for individuals convicted of felonies who are currently serving their sentences** by removing the incarceration disqualification from the voter qualification criteria.
- **Create a toll-free voter hotline** operated by the State Board of Elections for incarcerated individuals to receive reliable voting information, request election materials, and report voting rights violations.



These provisions address access barriers at the source and set up consistent, statewide processes rather than relying on individual facilities or staff.

National Context and Outcomes

Nationally, felony disenfranchisement laws vary widely. Only a handful of jurisdictions—**Maine, Vermont, Washington, D.C., and Puerto Rico**—allow all eligible citizens to vote regardless of incarceration status.

Research from The Sentencing Project highlights that states like Maine and Vermont retain voting rights for incarcerated individuals, and that maintaining civic ties during incarceration can help people build community identity and pro-social connections. Although turnout among incarcerated voters historically has been low, these findings show that **removing legal barriers and improving access has democratic value** and helps sustain connections to community life.

Expanding access to the ballot also aligns with broader democratic trends, such as state efforts to restore voting rights and remove burdensome disenfranchisement practices, recognizing that civic participation supports reintegration and community belonging.

Why This Matters in Maryland

Maryland currently restores voting rights upon release from incarceration, but there is no uniform mechanism to ensure that people are registered or informed once their rights return. HB 52 / SB 89 fills this gap by providing *both* eligibility reform and a practical tool (the hotline) to support compliance and access. This is consistent with Maryland's commitment to civic inclusion and reentry support.

Voting is one of the most fundamental forms of civic participation in a representative democracy. HB 52 / SB 89 ensures that eligible Marylanders behind bars are not wholly excluded from the process that shapes the laws and leaders governing their lives.

I respectfully urge a **favorable report on HB 52 / SB 89**.

Thank you for your consideration.

Marsha Briley-Savage

SB89 - Voting Rights for All_Badeker.pdf

Uploaded by: Melissa Badeker

Position: FAV

Dear **Members of the Education, Energy and the Environment Committee,**

This testimony is being submitted by Showing Up for Racial Justice Baltimore, a group of individuals working to move white folks as part of a multi-racial movement for equity and racial justice in Baltimore City, Baltimore County, and Howard County. We are also working in collaboration with Out for Justice. I am a resident of District **43A**. **I am testifying in support of SB089, the Voting Rights for All Act.**



Showing Up for Racial Justice

Americans have a long history of believing, without any real basis other than “gut instinct,” that being convicted of a crime makes you unsuited to the responsibilities of citizenship, including voting. But the idea that people who might “vote for the wrong people” should be barred from voting is deeply undemocratic. In addition, the historic over-prosecution of Black communities that leads to their over-representation in our prison populations has meant that this is the group most widely disenfranchised by laws which bar felons from voting. Over the past two decades, Maryland has taken important steps toward fixing these inequities: in 2007, the MGA passed legislation letting people convicted of felonies vote once their sentence was completed, and in 2016, that was expanded to include people who had completed any term of imprisonment. It is time for Maryland to take the final step and make sure that **every adult Marylander** has the ability to vote.

The Voting Rights for All Act would, first and foremost, re-enfranchise our fellow citizens who are serving sentences. It would also require the State Board of Elections to establish a voter hotline for incarcerated persons, to allow them to request information about voting and assist them in exercising their right to do so. This will ensure that despite not having free access to the internet and other resources, people who are incarcerated can still meaningfully exercise their right to vote. Any costs associated with the hotline should be at least partially offset by the costs saved when the Board of Elections no longer has to monitor criminal convictions across several courts and ensure people who are convicted of felonies are removed from the rolls.

Maryland should close the book on the racist legacy of felon disenfranchisement once and for all. It is for these reasons that I am encouraging you to vote **in support of SB089, the Voting Rights for All Act.**

Thank you for your time, service, and consideration.

Sincerely,
Melissa Badeker
2800 N. Calvert St., BSMT, Baltimore MD 21218

Showing Up for Racial Justice Baltimore

SB 89 - Gibson-Banks Center Testimony (Favorable).

Uploaded by: Michael Pinard

Position: FAV

**Testimony Concerning Senate Bill 89
Election Law – Incarcerated Individuals – Voter Hotline and Voting Eligibility
(Voting Rights for All Act)
Position: Favorable**

To: Senator Brian J. Feldman, Chair
Senator Cheryl C. Kagan, Vice-Chair
Members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

From: Michael Pinard, Faculty Director; and Monique L. Dixon, Executive Director,
Gibson-Banks Center for Race and the Law, University of Maryland Francis King
Carey School of Law

Date: February 9, 2026

On behalf of the Gibson-Banks Center for Race and the Law (“Gibson-Banks Center”) at the University of Maryland Francis King Carey School of Law,¹ we appreciate the opportunity to submit testimony in support of Senate Bill 89 (“SB 89”), which would, among other things, allow individuals incarcerated in Maryland’s prisons the opportunity to vote in state and federal elections. We urge the committee to issue a favorable report because: (1) the right to vote is fundamental to civic inclusion and engagement in our democracy; (2) denying voting rights to Marylanders who are incarcerated binds to a long history of Black disenfranchisement in the United States and disproportionately impacts Black Marylanders today, given the extreme overrepresentation of Black people in Maryland’s prison; and (3) extending the franchise in the ways set forth in SB 89 recognizes and cherishes the shared humanity of Marylanders, whether or not incarcerated.

The Gibson-Banks Center works collaboratively to re-imagine and transform institutions and systems of racial inequality, marginalization, and oppression. Through education and engagement, advocacy, and research, the Center examines and addresses racial inequality,

¹ This written testimony is submitted on behalf of the Gibson-Banks Center and not on behalf of the University of Maryland Francis King Carey School of Law, the University of Maryland, Baltimore, or the University System of Maryland.

including the intersection of race with sex or disability, and advances racial justice in a variety of issue areas, including the criminal legal system and voting rights.

The right to vote is fundamental. This year commemorates the 140th anniversary of the seminal United States Supreme Court case, *Yick Wo v. Hopkins*.² In *Yick Wo*, the Court articulated that voting is “a fundamental political right, because preservative of all rights.”³ In short, our voting rights protect and preserve our other rights. Thus, voting is the highest form of civic engagement. As such, depriving individuals of the ability to vote is a form of civic banishment.

Throughout U.S. history, Black people have been excluded from the franchise through various means.⁴ Disenfranchisement laws, from their beginning, were anchored in race. During Reconstruction, disenfranchisement was designed to circumvent and subvert the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments to the U.S. Constitution, which extended birthright citizenship to Black formerly enslaved persons, among other things, and prohibited racial discrimination in voting, respectively. Disenfranchisement also further cemented white supremacy.⁵ These efforts continued during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, with numerous (and adaptive) tactics deployed to prevent free Blacks from voting, including poll taxes and literacy tests.⁶

Disenfranchisement based on felony convictions has long been among the tools deployed to exclude Black citizens from voting booths. With post-Civil War roots, this form of disenfranchisement originally paired with “a slew of criminal laws designed to target [B]lack citizens,”⁷ as “many states enacted broad disenfranchisement laws that revoked voting rights

² *Yick Wo v. Hopkins*, 118 U.S. 356 (1886). While *Yick Wo* was not a voting rights case, the Court’s recognition of voting as a fundamental right has been repeated in subsequent voting rights cases. See, e.g., *Harper, et al. v. Virginia Board of Elections, et al*, 383 U.S. 663, 667 (1966) (citing to *Yick Wo* and other cases to support the notion that voting is a fundamental right.)

³ *Id.* at 370.

⁴ E.g., Anthony C. Thompson, *Unlocking Democracy: Examining the Collateral Consequences of Mass Incarceration on Black Political Power*, 54 HOWARD L. J. 587, 591 (2011) (“Political disenfranchisement of African-American communities has deep roots in the history of the United States.”).

⁵ E.g., Juan F. Perea, *Echoes of Slavery II: How Slavery’s Legacy Distorts Democracy*, 51 U.C. DAVIS L. REV. 1081, 1097 (2018) (“Since the Fifteenth Amendment prohibited direct race discrimination in voting, southern whites acted by proxy, shaping criminal law in such a way that disenfranchised newly freed [B]lacks.”).

⁶ E.g., Michael J. Klarman, *The Plessy Era*, 1998 SUP. CT. REV. 303, 309 (1998) (“Beginning around 1890, southern states adopted legal measures as poll taxes and literacy tests to supplement the substantial de facto disenfranchisement of [B]lacks already accomplished through violence and fraud.”); Malia Brink, 45 HUM. RTS. 12, 12 (2020) (“In the Jim Crow era, states enacted a number of laws to impede [B]lack people from voting, including residency and property restrictions, literacy tests, and poll taxes.”).

⁷ ERIN KELLY, BRENNAN CENTER FOR JUSTICE, RACISM AND FELONY DISENFRANCHISEMENT: AN INTERTWINED HISTORY I (May 9, 2017), <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/racism-felony-disenfranchisement-intertwined-history>. See Thompson, *supra* note 3, at 592 (disenfranchisement based on felony convictions “has had a direct impact on [B]lack voter participation in the political process since the period immediately following the Civil War when state laws were in enacted to in order to disenfranchise [B]lacks”).

from anyone convicted of any felony.”⁸ Today, disenfranchisement laws based on felony convictions continue to particularly impact Black people.⁹ According to the Sentencing Project, “[o]ne in 22 African Americans of voting age is disenfranchised, a rate more than triple that of non-African Americans.”¹⁰

While sobering, this context is necessary to grasp the urgency of SB 89, as it aims to remove the last vestige of disenfranchisement in Maryland based on criminal convictions. Until 2007, Maryland was among the few remaining states that imposed lifetime disenfranchisement on individuals based on their criminal records. Legislative advances over the past 19 years have led to Marylanders regaining their voting rights upon their release from incarceration.¹¹

Now is the time to remove Maryland’s remaining vestige of disenfranchisement by enacting SB 89 and extending voting rights to Marylanders housed in Maryland’s prisons. Today, Maryland has the ignominious distinction of incarcerating the highest percentage of Black people in the United States. Over 71% of Maryland’s incarcerated population is Black, which more than doubles the State’s overall Black population.¹² Thus, carceral disenfranchisement and race are tightly intertwined in Maryland, as “[v]oting eligible Black Marylanders are nearly six times as likely as white Marylanders to lose their right to vote due to incarceration for a felony conviction.”¹³

Maryland should join Maine, Vermont, Washington, D.C., and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, the U.S. jurisdictions that allow individuals who are incarcerated to vote. The District of Columbia extended the franchise to these now eligible voters in 2020.¹⁴ As the D.C.

⁸ KELLY, *supra* note 7, at 1.

⁹ E.g., Gabriel J. Chin, *Reconstruction, Felon Disenfranchisement, and the Right to Vote: Did the Fifteenth Amendment Repeal Section 2 of the Fourteenth Amendment*, 92 GEO. L.J. 259, 261-262 (2004) (“Criminal disenfranchisement . . . remains the major basis for the disproportionate disenfranchisement of African-American adults.”).

¹⁰ CHRISTOPHER UGGEN ET AL., THE SENTENCING PROJECT, LOCKED OUT 2024: FOUR MILLION DENIED VOTING RIGHTS DUE TO A FELONY CONVICTION 2 (2024), <https://www.sentencingproject.org/app/uploads/2024/10/Locked-Out-2024-Four-Million-Denied-Voting-Rights-Due-to-a-Felony-Conviction.pdf>.

¹¹ See BRENNAN CENTER FOR JUSTICE, VOTING RIGHTS RESTORATION EFFORTS IN MARYLAND: A SUMMARY OF CURRENT FELONY DISENFRANCHISEMENT POLICIES AND LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY IN MARYLAND (2020) (summarizing these legislative advances), <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/voting-rights-restoration-efforts-maryland>.

¹² See MARYLAND DEP’T. PUB. SAFETY AND CORR. SVCS, DOC DATA DASHBOARD, FY 2024 SENTENCED POPULATION OVERVIEW, DOC INMATE DEMOGRAPHICS (Black people comprised 71.2% of the incarcerated population in FY 2024 and the “[d]emographic trends among sentence inmates are largely consistent from year to year”), https://www.dpscs.state.md.us/community_releases/DOC-Annual-Data-Dashboard.shtml.

¹³ RACHEL DIDER-JOLIE & KRISTEN M. BUDD, PH.D., THE SENTENCING PROJECT, WHY WE MUST RESTORE VOTING RIGHTS TO OVER 16,000 MARYLANDERS 1 (Jan. 31, 2025), <https://www.sentencingproject.org/app/uploads/2025/02/Why-We-Must-Restore-Voting-Rights-to-Over-16000-Marylanders.pdf>. Also, “[t]he disenfranchisement rate of Maryland’s voting eligible Latino population is twice that of the white voting eligible population. *Id.*

¹⁴ D.C. CODE § 1-1001.07(c)(1)(B)(ii) (“[The Department of Corrections] shall automatically register each qualified elector in its care or custody in the Central Detention Facility or Correctional Treatment Facility to vote.”).

Council recognized when passing this law, “[v]oting is a way to maintain [community] connections and to feel stronger ties to one’s community while incarcerated.”¹⁵

Countries throughout the world are similarly instructive. According to the Sentencing Project, Human Rights Watch, and the ACLU, 35 countries do not deny voting rights under any circumstances based on criminal convictions. These countries include Canada, Denmark, Ghana, Iran, Israel, Lithuania, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Spain, Switzerland, and Namibia.¹⁶ In this context, a 2002 decision from the Supreme Court of Canada offers important lessons, as it speaks to the humanity of extending the franchise to incarcerated individuals as well as the perpetuation of racial harms of not doing so. In *Sauvé v. Canada (Chief Electoral Officer)*, the Court overturned a law that denied the right to vote to individuals who were sentenced to prison for more than two years.¹⁷ Rejecting the argument that “only those who respect the law should participate in the political process,” the Court declared that disenfranchising incarcerated individuals “on the basis of moral unworthiness is inconsistent with the respect for the dignity of every person that lies at the heart of Canadian democracy. . . .”¹⁸ The Court also lamented that carceral disenfranchisement “removes a route to social development and undermines correctional law and policy directed towards rehabilitation and integration.”¹⁹ In addition, the Court observed that the law had “a disproportionate impact on Canada’s already disadvantaged Aboriginal population[,]” given their disproportionate incarceration.²⁰

Voting in prison is *more* than extending the franchise to individuals who are incarcerated. Those of us who cherish our ability to vote understand deeply that the franchise is much more than circling the box for our chosen candidate. We value civic inclusion and speaking directly in furtherance of our democracy. Voting is both an act and a feeling. Through voting, Marylanders who are incarcerated would understand that their voices matter and that they are valued members of our shared community who deserve a voice in the affairs of the polity.

For these reasons set forth above, we ask for a favorable report on SB 89.

¹⁵ Council of the District of Columbia, Committee on the Judiciary & Public Safety, Committee Report on B23-0324 (the “Restore the Vote Amendment Act of 2020”), 7 (Sept. 24, 2020) (citing hearing witness testimony), https://lms.dccouncil.gov/downloads/LIMS/42718/Committee_Report/B23-0324-Committee_Report1.pdf?Id=111813.

¹⁶ THE SENTENCING PROJECT, HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH, AND ACLU, OUT OF STEP: U.S. POLICY ON VOTING RIGHTS IN GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE Tbl. 2, 21-28 (2024), <https://www.sentencingproject.org/app/uploads/2024/08/Out-of-Step-U.S.-Policy-on-Voting-Rights-in-Global-Perspective.pdf>. Also, 21 other countries only deny voting rights to individuals incarcerated for specific crimes, such as treason and elections-related offenses. *Id.*

¹⁷ *Sauvé v. Canada (Chief Electoral Officer)* [2002] 3 S.C.R 519 (Can).

¹⁸ *Id.* at 522.

¹⁹ *Id.* at 523.

²⁰ *Id.*

SB 89 _ HB 52 RCVMD Testimony - Voting Rights for

Uploaded by: Michelle Whittaker

Position: FAV

February 9, 2026

Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
Maryland Senate
2 West Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: Senate Bill 89 (House Bill 52)
Election Law - Incarcerated Individuals - Voter Hotline and Eligibility (Voting Rights for All Act)

Position: FAVORABLE

Dear Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee Members:

Voting is the essential foundation of democracy, allowing citizens to express their desires for policy and the public servants who lead government at every level. Ranked Choice Voting Maryland (RCV Maryland) believes we must ensure our electoral process ensures that every voice is heard and every vote is counted. The right to vote must be available and protected for every eligible voter.

We strongly support **SB 89 (HB 52)**, the Voting Rights for All Act, as a crucial stride toward justice and fair representation through the expansion of voting access for incarcerated individuals.

The disenfranchisement of incarcerated people and individuals with felony convictions has targeted and silenced specific communities, most particularly Black voters. Preventing any eligible voter from having a voice at the ballot box—while being directly affected by the policies of elected leaders—is an injustice.

According to the Sentencing Project, more than 16,000 Marylanders are currently disenfranchised due to criminal convictions. It is time to restore their voice in our democracy by empowering and equipping individuals to access voter registration information once they have finished their sentence.

SB 89 (HB 52) is a critical step forward and RCV Maryland is proud to be part of statewide efforts to ensure all Marylanders can participate fully in our democratic process.

The bill includes a series of transformative measures to eradicate disenfranchisement and empower marginalized communities, including:

- Expansion of voting rights to Marylanders completing their sentences inside prison;
- Establishes a toll-free voter hotline for people in prison to receive information about voting, request voting materials, and report voting rights violations.

By dismantling the barriers that bar tens of thousands of Marylanders from participating in our democracy brings us closer to a more representative democracy for all. Thank you for your consideration of this critical step towards an inclusive democracy. We urge a favorable report.

Sincerely,



Michelle C. Whittaker
Executive Director
Ranked Choice Voting Maryland

BTW VRA Testimony - Ikemefuna Chukwurah.docx.pdf

Uploaded by: Neka Duckett-Randolph

Position: FAV



TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB52/HB89

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

TO: Senator Charles E. Sydnor, III, Chair, and members of the Education, Energy, and Environment Committee

FROM: Ikemefuna Chukwurah, Behind the Wall Out For Justice Member

DATE: February 11, 2026

My name is Ikemefuna Chukwurah, and I am a Behind the Wall Member of Out for Justice. I respectfully urge this body to issue a favorable report on this bill.

Since the beginning of time, prison has been where men and women are sent to be punished for crimes or for political differences. Historically, incarceration has also meant disenfranchisement. Most of those affected were, and continue to be, people of color—individuals who cannot vote during any election while incarcerated due to felony convictions, and in some states, still cannot vote even after their release.

Within the past 40 to 50 years, Maryland has made a gradual transition from simply calling prisons prisons to identifying them as correctional institutions.

“Correctional” implies the process of correcting something, while “institution” refers to a place where an organization takes care of people for an extended period of time. This shift reflects the State of Maryland’s recognition that it cannot simply incarcerate men and women for violations, but must also commit to correcting thinking and behavior, while identifying those with the ability to learn and retain work skills that will help them successfully re-enter society.

Maryland has made meaningful progress in this regard, which leads me to believe that the state can also pass the Voting Rights for All Act. We simply need to understand its importance and commit to making it a reality.



There are many men and women incarcerated in Maryland for felony charges who deserve to be re-enfranchised. Like me, they remain deeply disappointed that society continues to deny us the right to vote because of past mistakes—mistakes that, in some cases, were made when we were teenagers. It is time to codify the enfranchisement of all incarcerated people . Please pass this bill, thank you.

BTW VRA Testimony - Todric Speaks.docx.pdf

Uploaded by: Neka Duckett-Randolph

Position: FAV



OUT FOR JUSTICE

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB52/HB89

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

TO: Senator Charles E. Sydnor, III, Chair, and members of the Education, Energy, and Environment Committee

FROM: **Todric Speaks**, Behind the Wall Member of Out For Justice Member

DATE: February 11, 2026

Dear Members of the Maryland General Assembly,

I am writing to you from behind prison walls to express my strong support for SB0089/HB0052 – the Voting Rights for All Act. This testimony comes directly from lived experience and from a place of hope, accountability, and belief in rehabilitation.

Every day that men and women wake up incarcerated, we are reminded of the harm caused by our past actions. We carry the weight of the families we left behind and the people we hurt. Many of us want to do better. We want to repair what we can and be part of positive change. Yet one of the most meaningful ways to contribute to society—the right to vote—is denied to us.

Laws passed at the state and federal level affect us every single day. They determine our sentences, our conditions of confinement, our access to rehabilitation, and our chances at a second opportunity. Despite this, the people most impacted by these laws are silenced. Allowing incarcerated people to vote would give us a voice in decisions that directly shape our lives and futures.

Voting is not about excusing past mistakes—it is about responsibility and rehabilitation. When people are trusted with a voice, they are encouraged to think beyond themselves, to engage with their communities, and to invest in the future. Taking part in the democratic process reinforces the idea that we are still members of society and that our growth matters.

If incarcerated people were allowed to vote, elected officials would have to acknowledge us as constituents. They would have to listen to our concerns, understand the realities inside prison walls, and consider policies that promote fairness, accountability, and public safety—not just punishment. This is how real change happens.



For too long, extreme sentences and harmful policies have been passed without input from those living with the consequences. History has shown us that when voices are excluded, injustice thrives. As we have seen in recent years, making your voice heard is power. For those of us behind the wall, voting is the most direct and meaningful way to be heard.

Passing the Voting Rights for All Act (SB0089/HB0052) sends a powerful message: that rehabilitation is real, that democracy includes everyone, and that men and women behind the wall still matter. It affirms that no one is beyond redemption and that participation—not exclusion—is the path to a safer and more just society.

I respectfully urge you to support and pass this bill. Our voices matter. Our futures matter. And our right to vote matters.

Sincerely,

Todric Speaks #299-106

Nicole D. Porter Maryland Senate Bill 89 testimony

Uploaded by: Nicole Porter

Position: FAV



Testimony of Nicole D. Porter
Senior Director of Advocacy
The Sentencing Project

In Support of Senate Bill 89, the Voting
Rights for All Act

Before the Maryland Senate
Education, Energy and Environment
Committee

February 11, 2026

Established in 1986, The Sentencing Project works for a fair and effective U.S. criminal justice system by promoting reforms in sentencing policy and addressing unjust racial disparities and practices. We are grateful for this opportunity to submit testimony supporting Senate Bill 89. The Sentencing Project thanks Senator C. Anthony Muse for his primary sponsorship on Senate Bill 89.

I am Nicole D. Porter, Senior Director of Advocacy for The Sentencing Project. I have had extensive engagement in public policy research on criminal legal issues for many years, with a particular focus on sentencing, collateral consequences of incarceration, and racial disparity. I have also authored numerous journal articles, reports and public commentary on shifting trends in state policy impacting criminal legal reform including voting rights for people with felony convictions. It is my honor to submit testimony to the Maryland State Senate to guarantee voting rights for all persons completing their sentence inside prisons and jails regardless of their crime of conviction.

Senate Bill 89 includes several provisions to expand voting rights to persons completing their felony sentence inside of Maryland prisons and jails.

- The legislation would repeal the prohibition on voting by incarcerated adults serving a felony court-ordered sentence.
- 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.

Momentum to Expand the Vote

Felony disenfranchisement laws and policies can be traced back to the founding of the United States when settler colonialists implemented the policy during their occupation of North America. The nation was founded on a paradox, a supposed experiment in democracy that was limited to wealthy white male property owners and excluded women, African Americans, persons who could not read, poor people, and persons with felony convictions. Over the course of two hundred years all of those voting exclusions have been eliminated with the exception of people with felony convictions.

Maryland is one of 48 states that ban voting for persons in prison with a felony conviction. Two states, Maine and Vermont, have never disenfranchised people due to a felony conviction. Washington, DC and Puerto Rico have expanded voting rights so that people can vote in prison while completing their sentence. The number of Maryland residents disenfranchised from voting in prison or jail due to a felony

conviction numbered 16,270 as of 2024¹, while nationally, over 4 million Americans are disenfranchised².

Since 1997, twenty-six states and Washington, DC have expanded voting rights to citizens with felony convictions. Maryland expanded voting rights to persons completing their sentence on felony probation and parole in 2016.³

Voting rights reforms in other jurisdictions and states include:

- This year, states considering measures to expand voting rights to incarcerated persons completing felony sentences include Illinois, Massachusetts, and Washington state.⁴
- Council Members in the District of Columbia expanded voting rights to persons completing their felony sentence in prison or jail (2020).⁵
- Eighteen states and Washington, DC enacted voting rights reforms between 2016 and 2023, either through legislation or executive action.
- Ten states either repealed or amended lifetime disenfranchisement laws since 1997.

In addition to the end of felony disenfranchisement in DC, several other states have considered guaranteeing voting rights for all regardless of incarceration status. In recent years, officials in Massachusetts, Illinois, and Washington state considered measures to guarantee voting rights for all citizens regardless of incarceration status.

Voting while Incarcerated

In recent years, a growing number of states and jurisdictions have worked to guarantee voting rights to incarcerated voters regardless of conviction status. Ballot access for eligible voters in correctional facilities includes absentee voting and in-person voting.

Maine and Vermont remain the only states that do not restrict voting based on criminal convictions while the District of Columbia and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico also allow persons with felonies who would otherwise be eligible to vote to cast a ballot while completing their prison sentence.⁶

¹ Maryland's Department of Legislative Services might be able to provide an updated analysis on persons completing their felony sentence in state prisons and local jails who are impacted by HB 1022. Please see [Racial Equity Impact Notes](#).

² Uggen, C., Larson, R., Shannon, S., & Stewart, R. (2024). [Locked out 2024: Estimates of people denied voting rights due to a felony conviction](#). The Sentencing Project.

³ Porter, N. D., & McLeod, M. (2023). [Expanding the Vote: State Felony Disenfranchisement Reforms, 1997-2023](#). The Sentencing Project.

⁴ See: See: Illinois General Assembly. (2025). *S.B. 1733, 104th Gen. Assemb., Reg. Sess.* <https://www.ilga.gov/legislation/BillStatus.asp?DocNum=1733&GAID=18&DocTypeID=SB&SessionID=114&GA=104>; Massachusetts General Court. (2025). *H.874, An Act relative to voting rights restoration* (194th General Court). <https://malegislature.gov>; and Washington State Legislature. (2025). *H.B. 1196, 2025–2026 Regular Session*. <https://lawfilesexternal.wa.gov/Biennium/2025-26/Htm/Bills/House%20Bills/1196.htm>.

⁵ D.C. Law 23-277. *Restore the Vote Amendment Act of 2020*. <https://code.dccouncil.gov/us/dc/council/laws/23-27>

⁶ See note 2.

In some locations, eligible incarcerated voters can vote in-person.

- During 2024, Colorado lawmakers enacted a first-in-nation bill that mandates all county jails provide in-person voting. Lawmakers mandated the county clerk and the sheriff's designee to provide at least one day of in-person voting at the county jail or detention center.⁷
- In 2019, Illinois officials expanded voter access and education efforts in jails across the state by authorizing counties with a population of 3,000,000 or more to establish a temporary in-person voting center in county jails.⁸
- During 2016, more than 6,100 voters sentenced to prison in Puerto Rico cast their ballot at in-person voting centers in the Republican primary.⁹

Voting and Community Safety for Persons Completing their Sentence

It is long past time to remedy the exclusion of the last remaining group of citizens who are denied the right to vote — those with felony convictions. This would represent a healthy expansion of our democracy and public safety. Voting is among several prosocial behaviors for justice impacted persons, like getting a college education, that is associated with reduced criminal conduct.¹⁰ Having the right to vote or voting is related to reduced recidivism for persons with a criminal legal history.¹¹

Disenfranchisement has no deterrent effect on crime.¹² Some critics of prisoner voting contend that being sentenced to a felony is an indicator of being “untrustworthy.” Any character test is a slippery slope and this minimizes eligible voters. You might be concerned that your neighbor is an alcoholic or has personality flaws, but they still maintain the right to vote in a democracy.¹³

Felony disenfranchisement also ignores the important distinction between legitimate punishment for a crime and one's rights as a citizen. Convicted individuals may be sentenced to prison, but they generally maintain their basic rights. Even if someone is held in a maximum security prison cell, they still have the right to get married or divorced, or to buy or sell property. And to the extent that voting is an extension of free speech, consider that a person in prison may have an op-ed published, perhaps with greater

⁷ Colo. Rev. Stat. § 1-2-103

⁸ IL ST CH 10 § 5/19A-20

⁹ Newkirk III, V. (2016). *Polls for Prisons*. The Atlantic Magazine.

¹⁰ Bozick, R., Steele, J., Davis, L., & Turner, S. (2018). Does providing inmates with education improve postrelease outcomes? A meta analysis of correctional education programs in the United States. *Journal of Experimental Criminology*, 14, 389-428. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11292-018-9334-6>; Uggen, C., Manza, J., & Behrens, A. (2013). 'Less than the average citizen': Stigma, role transition and the civic reintegration of convicted felons. In S. Maruna & R. Immarigeon (Eds.), *After crime and punishment* (pp. 258-287). Willan.

<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781843924203>; Uggen, C., & Manza, J. (2004). Voting and subsequent crime and arrest: Evidence from a community sample. *Columbia Human Rights Law Review*, 36(1), 193-216.

¹¹ Hamilton-Smith, G. P., & Vogel, M. (2012). The violence of voicelessness: The impact of felony disenfranchisement on recidivism. *Berkeley La Raza Law Journal*, 22, 407-432. <https://doi.org/10.15779/Z38Z66F>; Uggen & Manza (2004), see note 9.

¹² Poulos, C. (2019). *The fight against felony disenfranchisement*. Harvard Law and Policy Review Blog.

¹³ Mauer, M. (2011). *Voting behind bars: An argument for voting by prisoners*. Howard Law Journal.

impact than casting a single vote. Persons who are currently disenfranchised have anchored policy change campaigns in Nebraska and Texas.¹⁴

Disenfranchisement proponents sometimes raise the possibility of a prisoners' "voting bloc" that would run counter to the interests of the "law-abiding public." If such a group of "pro-crime" individuals were a real threat, they would somehow have to convince the public into electing a majority of state legislators as well as a governor who shared their position. This is a far fetched concern and hardly a threat to public safety.

The Case to Guarantee Voting Rights for All

Felony disenfranchisement policies, including for persons completing their prison sentence, are inherently undemocratic. The United States is very much out of line with world standards, and it is important to take a fresh look at the rationale and impact of policies that can only be described as aberrant by international norms.¹⁵

The Sentencing Project applauds Senate Bill 89 and recommends a favorable report from the Senate Education, Energy, and Environment committee.

¹⁴ Demetrius Gatson, an organizer and reentry service provider with QUEENS Butterfly House, is disenfranchised while completing her parole sentence.; Robert Lilly, community organizer, formerly with Grassroots Leadership, is disenfranchised while completing his parole sentence in Texas.

¹⁵ Porter, N., Parker, A., Walk, T., Topaz, J., Turner, J., Smith, C., Laronde-K, M., Pierce, S., & Ebenstein, J. (2024). [Out of Step: U.S. Policy on Voting Rights in Global Perspective](#). The Sentencing Project.

NVPC Group Support Ltr (MD Voting Rights for All H

Uploaded by: Nicole Porter

Position: FAV



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.¹

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.

¹ 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.”² Given that 95% of people serving sentences in Maryland’s prisons are ultimately released,³ 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.”⁴

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.”⁵ 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.”⁶

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.”⁷ 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.”⁸ Another study found that “individuals who are released in states that permanently disenfranchise are roughly nineteen percent *more likely* to

² Ewald, *supra* note 6, at 11.

³ 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>

⁴ 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 the notion that political participation is the path to moral growth.”).

⁵ 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 Salience of Adult Social Bonds*, 55 AM. SOC. REV. 609, 617-618 (1990); Christopher 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).

⁶ Uggen & Manza, *supra* note 15, at 197.

⁷ *Id.* at 205.

⁸ *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.”⁹

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.

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

⁹ 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

NVPC Group Support Ltr (MD Voting Rights for All H

Uploaded by: Nicole Porter

Position: FAV



February 9, 2026

The Honorable Melissa Wells
Chair, House Government Labor and Elections
Maryland House of Delegates
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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.¹

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.

¹ 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.”² Given that 95% of people serving sentences in Maryland’s prisons are ultimately released,³ 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.”⁴

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.”⁵ 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.”⁶

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.”⁷ 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.”⁸ Another study found that “individuals who are released in states that permanently disenfranchise are roughly nineteen percent *more likely* to

² Ewald, *supra* note 6, at 11.

³ 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>

⁴ 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.”).

⁵ 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).

⁶ Uggen & Manza, *supra* note 15, at 197.

⁷ *Id.* at 205.

⁸ *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.”⁹

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.

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
Common Cause MD
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

⁹ 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).

Maryland League of Conservation Voters
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

2-11 SB 89 Voter Hotline and Voting Eligibility (Vo

Uploaded by: Nikki Tyree

Position: FAV



TESTIMONY TO THE SENATE EDUCATION, ENERGY, AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

SB 89 Election Law - Incarcerated Individuals - Voter Hotline and Voting Eligibility (Voting Rights for All Act)

Position – Support

BY: Linda T. Kohn, President

Date: February 11, 2026

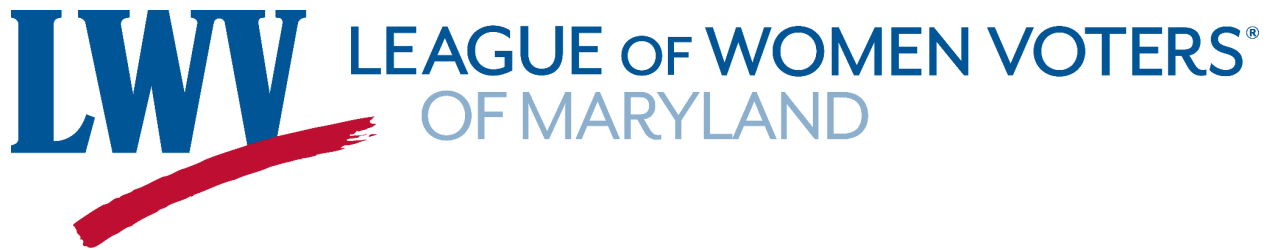
The League of Women Voters of Maryland believes that voting is a fundamental citizen right that must be guaranteed. Elections should produce representation that reflects community sentiment and is feasible to implement. The League also supports a criminal justice system that is just, effective, equitable, and transparent, and that fosters public trust at all stages.

Senate Bill 89, the Voting Rights for All Act, expands voting access by establishing a voter hotline for incarcerated individuals and allowing people with felony convictions who are currently serving to vote.

According to the Sentencing Project, more than 16,000 Marylanders are currently disenfranchised due to criminal convictions in Maryland. This means that 16,000 people are not eligible to vote and, therefore, have no voice in democracy. Without this voice, they have no say in how their communities, locally and on a state level, are impacted. They do not get to vote on who will be on the Board of Education of their children's school districts or who will represent them at any level of government.

We know that when more people are able to vote and express themselves, the more robust and representative our democracy becomes. We also know that closing the door on people who have or should have the right to vote limits who elected officials are actually representing. Enfranchising those currently serving felony convictions is just good democracy. Voting, or losing the vote, should not be used as a punitive measure.

For years, League members and leaders have been going into jails and prisons and encouraging voter registration and participation from those who are eligible under current law. Every time they do, they are met with interest and desire to participate more fully in our democracy. Maryland is actively barring people from voting and not permitting them to participate in society as a whole. Leaders in justice reform would tell you that the more these individuals are able to participate in society, the more invested they become and the less likely they are to re-offend. While voting may seem like a small action to take for so many, it is not for those who are not allowed to do it.



Beyond that, SB 89 would streamline and create a universal system for all facilities to implement voting. Right now, in some places, there is some confusion and a lack of will to engage incarcerated people to vote. If SB 89 were to pass, it would institute a voter hotline and more concrete processes.

Those incarcerated generally do not have convenient access to the necessary forms and instructions to register to vote or apply for a mail-in ballot, nor do they have an easy way to obtain detailed information about candidates or ballot questions. Because voter education is one of the League's foundational principles for elections, our local Leagues spent considerable time and energy delivering our nonpartisan voting information.

The simple fact is that ending the current practice of disenfranchisement based on a person's conviction would eliminate all the work, errors, and costs associated with having some in jails and prisons who can vote and others who can not. The League has witnessed the confusion among eligible voters and agencies that would be eliminated should universal voting be the law of Maryland.

The League of Women Voters of Maryland, representing members all across Maryland, urges a favorable report on SB 89.

SB 89 Fav Testimony, Marian House.pdf

Uploaded by: Psalms Rojas

Position: FAV



MARIAN HOUSE

Women Moving from Dependence to Independence

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 89

February 9, 2026

Marian House strongly supports SB 89: Election Law – Incarcerated Individuals – Voter Hotline and Voter Eligibility (Voting Rights for All Act), establishing a toll-free voter hotline for incarcerated individuals and altering the circumstances in which incarcerated individuals are able to vote. This hotline will provide a channel for incarcerated individuals to receive voting information, request election materials, report voting violations, and broaden access to voting. If enacted, this bill will strengthen our communities and promote rehabilitation within Maryland's prison systems.

Marian House is a holistic community that provides women and their children with housing and comprehensive, wrap-around support services. Marian House provides a safe, sober, and loving environment that challenges women to respect and love themselves, confront emotional and socioeconomic barriers, and transition to stable, independent lives.

95% of the US incarcerated population are released and return to their respective communities¹ The reunification these individuals experience is often difficult as they have become physically and cognitively distance from their communities and lives before incarceration. The ability to vote mitigates the disconnect that inmates have from their communities. With the provision of election materials and access to voting, people who are experiencing incarceration are able to inform and involve themselves in public matters and stay up to date on the changes and attitudes within their communities and homes, narrowing their cognitive distance.

While those experiencing incarceration are physically separated from society, they are still a large part of our society. In Maryland the incarcerated population make up 32,000 voices, family members, community participants, and potential votes². For many of these 32,000 individuals, voting means taking part in community action, voting in favor of their child's best interest, and making a difference in the society they are working to rejoin. While voting can be something that is easy to overlook, for individuals serving a prison sentence, voting is an essential part of staying connected to family, community, and establishing a positive civic identity³.

Marian House is eager to support the Voting Rights for All Act. For over forty-three years, Marian House has been serving women reentering the community from Maryland's carceral system, many of whom spent years to decades incarcerated. SB 89 provides representation to a population often diminished by society, creating an opportunity for them to participate and support the communities they are preparing to rejoin.

Thank you for your consideration,


Rebecca Perry
Interim Chief Executive Officer / Chief Operating Officer

RP/np

¹ *Statistics*. (2021). Reentry Essential, Inc. <https://reentryessentials.org/pages/statistics>

² Initiative, P. P. (n.d.). *Maryland profile*. Maryland profile | Prison Policy Initiative. <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/profiles/MD.html>

³ Miller, B., & Spillane, J. (2012). Civil death: An examination of ex-felon disenfranchisement and reintegration. *Punishment & Society*, 14, 402–428. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1462474512452513>; Shineman, V. (2020). Restoring voting rights: Evidence that reversing felony disenfranchisement increases political efficacy. *Policy Studies*, 41(2-3), 131-150. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01442872.2019.1694655>; Uggen et al. (2013)

Eckel FAV SB89 - Voting Rights for All 2.pdf

Uploaded by: Rianna Eckel

Position: FAV

Dear Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and Honorable Members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee,

My name is Rianna Eckel, I live in the 43rd District, and I am a member of Showing Up for Racial Justice Baltimore. Showing Up for Racial Justice Baltimore is a group of individuals working to move white folks as part of a multi-racial movement for equity and racial justice in Baltimore City, Baltimore County, and Howard County. We are also working in collaboration with Out for Justice. **I am writing in support of SB089, the Voting Rights for All Act.**



Showing Up for Racial Justice

Americans have a long history of believing, without any real basis other than “gut instinct,” that being convicted of a crime makes you unsuited to the responsibilities of citizenship, including voting. But the idea that people who might “vote for the wrong people” should be barred from voting is deeply undemocratic. In addition, the historic over-prosecution of Black communities that leads to their over-representation in our prison populations has meant that this is the group most widely disenfranchised by laws which bar felons from voting. Over the past two decades, Maryland has taken important steps toward fixing these inequities: in 2007, the MGA passed legislation letting people convicted of felonies vote once their sentence was completed, and in 2016, that was expanded to include people who had completed any term of imprisonment. It is time for Maryland to take the final step and make sure that **every adult Marylander** has the ability to vote.

The Voting Rights for All Act would, first and foremost, re-enfranchise our fellow citizens who are serving sentences. It would also require the State Board of Elections to establish a voter hotline for incarcerated persons, to allow them to request information about voting and assist them in exercising their right to do so. This will ensure that despite not having free access to the internet and other resources, people who are incarcerated can still meaningfully exercise their right to vote. Any costs associated with the hotline should be at least partially offset by the costs saved when the Board of Elections no longer has to monitor criminal convictions across several courts and ensure people who are convicted of felonies are removed from the rolls.

Maryland should close the book on the racist legacy of felon disenfranchisement once and for all. It is for these reasons that I am encouraging you to vote **in support of SB089, the Voting Rights for All Act.**

Thank you for your time, service, and consideration.

Sincerely,
Rianna Eckel
2300 Hunter St, Baltimore MD 21218
Showing Up for Racial Justice Baltimore

Testimony in support of SB0089 - Voting Rights for

Uploaded by: Richard KAP Kaplowitz

Position: FAV

02/11/2026

Richard Keith Kaplowitz
Frederick, MD 21703

TESTIMONY ON SB#/0089- POSITION: FAVORABLE

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

TO: Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and members of the Education, Energy and the Environment Committee

FROM: Richard Keith Kaplowitz

My name is Richard Keith Kaplowitz. I am a resident of District 3, Frederick County. I am submitting this testimony in support of SB#/0089, **Election Law - Incarcerated Individuals - Voter Hotline and Voting Eligibility (Voting Rights for All Act)**

This bill accomplishes two purposes in support of the right of every citizen to have a voice in our government by exercising the right to vote. First, it sets up a methodology for incarcerated individuals to receive information to assist them in exercising the right to vote. Secondly, it says that a convicted felon serving a sentence is paying the debt to society but should not lose their right to vote due to that circumstance.

As noted by the Prison Policy Initiative ¹

Most people in jail are legally eligible to vote, but in practice, they can't. This "[de facto disenfranchisement](#)" stems from numerous factors, including widespread misinformation about eligibility, myriad barriers to voter registration, and challenges to casting a ballot.

The barriers facing incarcerated voters are numerous... the difficulties of voting from jail are compounded by the fact that jail voting falls within the purview of two distinct authorities: local sheriffs (who oversee and operate jails) and election officials (who bear responsibility for implementing voting procedures). A lack of cooperation (or downright obstruction) on the part of either of those actors can—and often does—make voting impossible for many jailed people who retain the right to cast a ballot....Successful reforms will enable thousands of eligible voters to make their voices heard and will affirm that the voice of every voter matters.

Maryland can and should work to eliminate all barriers to voting for incarcerated individuals. This can be accomplished by requiring the State Board of Elections to provide a toll-free voter hotline for incarcerated individuals to receive information about voting, request election-related materials, and report voting rights violations;

¹ https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/jail_voting.html

TESTIMONY ON SB#/0089- POSITION: FAVORABLE

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

and altering the circumstances under which an individual is not qualified to be a registered voter for the purpose of allowing individuals convicted of a felony and serving a court-ordered sentence of imprisonment for the conviction to register to vote.

I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report on SB#/0089.

_OPD Testimony SB0089.docx.pdf

Uploaded by: shannice anderson

Position: FAV



NATASHA DARTIGUE
PUBLIC DEFENDER

KEITH LOTRIDGE
DEPUTY PUBLIC DEFENDER

HANNIBAL KEMERER
CHIEF OF STAFF

ELIZABETH HILLIARD
DIRECTOR OF GOVERNMENT RELATIONS

POSITION ON PROPOSED LEGISLATION

**BILL: SB0089 -Election Law- Incarcerated Individuals - Voter Hotline and Voting Eligibility
(Voting Rights for All Act)**

FROM: Maryland Office of the Public Defender

POSITION: Favorable

DATE: February 11, 2026

The Maryland Office of the Public Defender respectfully requests that the Committee issue a favorable report on Senate Bill 89.

This bill strengthens democracy by ensuring that voting rights are meaningful, accessible, and fairly administered. A toll-free voter hotline for incarcerated individuals would provide a practical, secure way for people in custody to obtain accurate voting information, request necessary materials, and report violations of their rights. Access to reliable information is essential to the integrity of any election system, and incarceration should not mean isolation from civic processes.

Equally important, the bill modernizes voter eligibility laws by allowing individuals convicted of a felony and serving a court-ordered sentence of imprisonment to register to vote.

Disenfranchisement during incarceration disproportionately impacts marginalized communities and weakens representative government.

This bill is a necessary step toward a more just, inclusive, and representative electoral system.

For these reasons, the Maryland Office of the Public Defender urges this Committee to issue a favorable report on Senate Bill 0089

Submitted by: Maryland Office of the Public Defender, Government Relations Division.

Authored by: Shannice Anderson, Community Engagement Coordinator PH: 667- 406-2362

OPD Testimony SB0089.docx.pdf

Uploaded by: shannice anderson

Position: FAV



NATASHA DARTIGUE
PUBLIC DEFENDER
KEITH LOTRIDGE
DEPUTY PUBLIC DEFENDER
HANNIBAL KEMERER
CHIEF OF STAFF
ELIZABETH HILLIARD
DIRECTOR OF GOVERNMENT RELATIONS

POSITION ON PROPOSED LEGISLATION

BILL: SB0089 [Voting Rights For All Act]

FROM: Maryland Office of the Public Defender

POSITION: Favorable

DATE: 2/9/26

The Maryland Office of the Public Defender respectfully requests that the Committee issue a favorable report on Senate Bill #0089.

This bill is an important measure that ensures voting rights are meaningful, accessible, and fairly administered for all eligible individuals. A toll-free voter hotline for incarcerated individuals would provide a practical, secure way for people in custody to obtain accurate voting information, request necessary materials, and report violations of their rights. Access to reliable information is essential to the integrity of any election system, and incarceration should not mean isolation from civic processes.

Equally important, the bill modernizes voter eligibility laws by allowing individuals convicted of a felony and serving a court-ordered sentence of imprisonment to register to vote.

Disenfranchisement during incarceration disproportionately impacts marginalized communities and weakens representative government.

This bill recognizes voter participation as a tool for civic engagement that supports successful reentry and reduces recidivism.

For these reasons, the Maryland Office of the Public Defender urges this Committee to issue a favorable report on SB #0089

Submitted by: Maryland Office of the Public Defender, Government Relations Division.

Authored by: Shannice Anderson, Community Engagement Coordinator PH:667- 406-2362

SB89 - Voting Rights for All_TH.pdf

Uploaded by: Theresa M. Hoffman

Position: FAV

Dear Members of the Education, Energy and the Environment Committee,

This testimony is being submitted by Showing Up for Racial Justice Baltimore, a group of individuals working to move white folks as part of a multi-racial movement for equity and racial justice in Baltimore City, Baltimore County, and Howard County. We are also working in collaboration with Out for Justice. I am a resident of District 43b. **I am testifying in support of SB089, the Voting Rights for All Act.**



Showing Up for Racial Justice

Americans have a long history of believing, without any real basis other than “gut instinct,” that being convicted of a crime makes you unsuited to the responsibilities of citizenship, including voting. But the idea that people who might “vote for the wrong people” should be barred from voting is deeply undemocratic. In addition, the historic over-prosecution of Black communities that leads to their over-representation in our prison populations has meant that this is the group most widely disenfranchised by laws which bar felons from voting. Over the past two decades, Maryland has taken important steps toward fixing these inequities: in 2007, the MGA passed legislation letting people convicted of felonies vote once their sentence was completed, and in 2016, that was expanded to include people who had completed any term of imprisonment. It is time for Maryland to take the final step and make sure that **every adult Marylander** has the ability to vote.

The Voting Rights for All Act would, first and foremost, re-enfranchise our fellow citizens who are serving sentences. It would also require the State Board of Elections to establish a voter hotline for incarcerated persons, to allow them to request information about voting and assist them in exercising their right to do so. This will ensure that despite not having free access to the internet and other resources, people who are incarcerated can still meaningfully exercise their right to vote. Any costs associated with the hotline should be at least partially offset by the costs saved when the Board of Elections no longer has to monitor criminal convictions across several courts and ensure people who are convicted of felonies are removed from the rolls.

Maryland should close the book on the racist legacy of felon disenfranchisement once and for all. It is for these reasons that I am encouraging you to vote **in support of SB089, the Voting Rights for All Act.**

Thank you for your time, service, and consideration.

Sincerely,
Theresa M. Hoffman
803 Seaward Rd., Towson, MD 21286
Showing Up for Racial Justice Baltimore

SB 89_ FAV_ ACLU MD.pdf

Uploaded by: Tierra Bradford

Position: FAV



**Testimony for the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
February 11, 2026**

**SB 89 - Election Law – Incarcerated Individuals – Voting Eligibility and
Access (Voting Rights for All Act)**

FAVORABLE

The ACLU of Maryland supports SB 89, the Voting Rights for All Act, which seeks to allow individuals convicted of a felony and serving a court-ordered sentence of imprisonment for the conviction to register to vote. In addition, the bill seeks to require the State Board of Elections (SBE) provide a toll-free voter hotline for incarcerated individuals. Voter disenfranchisement laws were intentionally designed, under our historical white supremacist system, to block the political power of Black and Brown people through imprisonment, racist policing, and the then-novel idea of linking the right to vote to incarceration.

TIERRA BRADFORD
SENIOR POLICY COUNSEL

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LIBERTIES UNION
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OFFICERS AND DIRECTORS
COREY STOTTEMYER
PRESIDENT

DANA VICKERS SHELLEY
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

ANDREW FREEMAN
GENERAL COUNSEL

Shameful History of Voter Disenfranchisement in the United States

The history and racist roots of disenfranchisement laws have been laid bare by progressive justice organizations like the Sentencing Project, ACLU, and Brennan Center. To summarize, the notion of a “civil death” which included the penalty of disenfranchisement was attached to certain offenses, deemed egregious enough. The idea is traced back to colonial laws but were widely adopted after the American Revolution.¹ The early disenfranchisement laws, much like voting laws that preceded them and denied the right to vote based on property, sex, race, etc., sought to limit the influence and power of marginalized groups. In the case of Alabama, the author of the state’s law identified offenses eligible for disenfranchisement with an eye toward disqualifying Black voters.²

The legacy of these laws cannot be overstated. As of 2016, 6.1 million Americans were stripped of the right to vote because of felony disenfranchisement laws.³ One of every 13 Black adults is disenfranchised. Virginia, Kentucky, and Tennessee fare even worse—one in five Blacks have been disenfranchised. In total, 2.2 million Black citizens are banned from voting. Thirty-eight percent of the disenfranchised population in America is Black.⁴

The number of ineligible voters, however, is merely the tip of the iceberg. It does not begin to account for the generations of lost political power within Black communities. It is a frustrating exercise to speculate how many leaders accountable to Black communities

¹ <https://www.sentencingproject.org/policy-brief/voting-rights-in-the-era-of-mass-incarceration-a-primer/>

² <https://www.sentencingproject.org/policy-brief/voting-rights-in-the-era-of-mass-incarceration-a-primer/>

³ <https://www.sentencingproject.org/policy-brief/voting-rights-in-the-era-of-mass-incarceration-a-primer/>

⁴ <https://www.aclu.org/news/voting-rights/racist-roots-denying-incarcerated-people-their-right-vote>

could have been elected to office, the progressive policies that could have been enacted, the progress that could have been made.⁵

Maryland's Disenfranchisement Laws

Here in Maryland, as is the case nationwide, the history of voter disenfranchisement laws is tortured and inconclusive. Maryland's first felon disenfranchisement law dates back to 1851.⁶ Under that law, persons convicted of "infamous crimes"—any felony, treason, perjury, or any crime involving an element of deceit, fraud, or corruption—were permanently denied the right to vote. The felony disenfranchisement law bore the unfortunate company of laws that allowed only free white men could vote.⁷ and Section 43 of the Constitution which held that the Legislature "shall not pass any law abolishing the relation of master or slave, as it now exists in the State."

In 1974, the General Assembly amended the law to allow persons convicted of infamous crimes to vote upon completion of their sentence and any period of supervision. Persons convicted of a subsequent infamous crime ("recidivists") remained permanently disenfranchised.

In 2001, the legislature created the "Task Force to Study Repealing the Disenfranchisement of Convicted Felons in Maryland."⁸ The work of the Task Force unearthed several troubling facts—at that time, Maryland was one of only two states in the nation which permanently disenfranchised persons convicted of subsequent felonies. Only eight other states had harsher laws on the books. The state also had the tenth highest rate of disenfranchised persons in the Country. Worse, the compounding impact of the racist criminal justice system caused a significant diluting effect on the voting power of Black men—15.4% of Black men in Maryland at the time were disenfranchised.⁹

In 2002, the following legislative session, the General Assembly restored the voting rights of persons convicted of multiple charges of theft or infamous crimes after three years had lapsed since the completion of the person's sentence or supervision. The body left in place permanent disenfranchisement of persons convicted of a second or subsequent violent crime.¹⁰

2007 would see another revision to the law, stripping out any consideration for the number of convictions or the nature of the offense. Any person convicted of a felony would be re-enfranchised upon completion of their sentence or supervision.¹¹ The Fiscal and Policy

⁵ Under the Election Law Article, persons who have been convicted of buying or selling votes are permanently stripped of the right to vote. This testimony does not address this small universe of persons.

⁶ https://felonvoting.procon.org/sourcefiles/1851_Maryland_Constitution.pdf (Art I, Sec. http://users.cla.umn.edu/~uggen/Behrens_Uggen_Manza_ajs.pdf)

⁷ <https://www.britannica.com/procon/felon-voting-debate> (Art I, Sec. 1)

⁸ 2001 [Task Force to Study Repealing the Disenfranchisement of Convicted Felons in Maryland](#) (2001 [HB 495](#))

⁹ Unquestionably, voter disenfranchisement laws also bear a negative impact on Latinx communities. This impact is more difficult to measure because Maryland fails to collect reliable data about the ethnicity of persons interacting with the justice system.

¹⁰ https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/2002rs/fnotes/bil_0004/sb0184.PDF

¹¹ <https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/mgawebsearch/legislation?target=/2007rs/billfile/hb0273.htm>

Note accompanying the 2007 legislation noted that in 2006, about 8,678 persons were released from the Department of Corrections after serving a sentence for a felony.

In 2015, with the passage of SB 89, which further limited the disenfranchisement laws to the period during which a person convicted of a felony is incarcerated. In other words, persons under supervision would no longer be disenfranchised.¹² Governor Hogan vetoed the bill, but his veto was overridden in 2016. The legislation re-enfranchised over 40,000 Marylanders.¹³ This effort was proudly and effectively led by formerly incarcerated people who were most directly impacted by disenfranchisement laws.

Finally, the most recent changes to the law came in 2021, with the passage of the Value My Vote Act, which requires the State Board of Elections establish a program to disseminate voting information, voter registration applications, and absentee ballot applications to eligible voters in correctional facilities. Passage of SB 89 builds on the important work the Value My Vote Act started by returning the sacred right of enfranchisement back to the most underrepresented population of people in the State of Maryland.

The Ramifications for Baltimore City and Black Voting Power in Maryland

Disenfranchisement laws have a clear disparate impact of the Black vote across the country, here in Maryland and most starkly for Baltimore City. The compounding impact of disenfranchisement laws together with the racial disparities that plague Maryland's prisons create the insidious and undeniable result that Black Baltimoreans are denied full participation in our democracy. Black Marylanders make up roughly 30% of the state's population. Yet, over 70% of the state prison population is Black. In 2022, Maryland's disenfranchised population totaled 16, 587 with Black people making up 11, 678 of that figure.

To give this data some national context—Maryland is infamously the most racially disparate prison population in the Country. Only twelve other states have the tragic distinction of having a greater than 50% Black prison population.¹⁴

Compounded with the racial disparities is the further diluting effect of Baltimore City's overrepresentation in prisons and jails. As of January 2019, almost 30% of all Maryland's prison inmates were Baltimoreans.¹⁵ Baltimoreans make up just 10% of the state's population.¹⁶ To be clear, not all Baltimore's communities fared equally—voter disenfranchisement has a concentrated effect on certain communities. A 2015 report by the Justice Policy Institute found that 75% of imprisoned Baltimoreans hailed from 25 of the City's 55 communities.¹⁷ Without a doubt, over-policing and unconstitutional policing of poor, Black neighborhoods contribute to this dynamic.

¹² <https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/mgaweb/legislation/details/hb0980?ys=2015rs>

¹³ <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/02/maryland-felon-voting/462000/>

¹⁴ <https://www.sentencingproject.org/app/uploads/2022/08/The-Color-of-Justice-Racial-and-Ethnic-Disparity-in-State-Prisons.pdf>

¹⁵ <https://www.baltimoresun.com/2019/04/24/marylands-prison-population-drops-to-1980s-levels-continuing-a-multiyear-decline/>

¹⁶ http://www.justicepolicy.org/uploads/justicepolicy/documents/rightinvestment_design_2.23.15_final.pdf

¹⁷

http://www.justicepolicy.org/uploads/justicepolicy/documents/rightinvestment_design_2.23.15_final.pdf

Consider the implications this holds for local and statewide elections in terms of actual numbers of voters. In 2010, 7,795 Baltimoreans were imprisoned. Democratic primaries for a seat in the House of Delegates are often decided within margins of 100 or fewer votes. It's therefore not a far-flung notion that incarcerated Marylanders could have a decisive impact in elections. Lastly, voting is a fundamental right and the cornerstone of our democracy. Denying the right to vote to an entire class of citizens undermines our democracy and makes our society less inclusive. We also know that voting plays an important role in helping individuals with felony convictions return to society. Studies have shown that when individuals with a felony conviction participate in the democratic process, they have a lower rate of subsequent arrest. By denying people even the basic right to vote, we are only preventing them from having a stronger stake in their community and making it harder for them to successfully return to society.

For these reasons, the ACLU of Maryland urges a favorable report on SB 89.

SB0089_HB0052_Voting_Rights_4_All_Act_FAV_OFJ_Trin

Uploaded by: Trina Selden

Position: FAV



TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SENATE BILL 89

**Election Law - Incarcerated Individuals -
Voter Hotline and Voting Eligibility (Voting Rights for All Act)
SB89/HB52**

TO: Chair, Vice Chair, and members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

FROM: **Trina Selden**, Founder and Executive Director, Out For Justice

DATE: February 11, 2026

My name is Trina Selden, and I am the Founder and Executive Director of Out for Justice, an organization dedicated to dismantling barriers to reentry and advocating for the rights of justice-impacted individuals. I am here today to urge this committee to pass **SB89/HB52**, legislation that would establish critical protections against racial vote dilution and strengthen Maryland's democracy.

When I came home from prison in 2003, I encountered barrier after barrier that made reentry feel almost impossible. I struggled to obtain basic identification—my birth certificate, Social Security card, and driver's license. These were not just bureaucratic hurdles; they were constant reminders that the system was designed to exclude and silence people like me.

One of the most painful losses I experienced was the loss of my right to vote. Even after completing probation, I was misinformed and denied the ability to register. Losing my vote meant **losing my voice at a time when decisions were being made every day about housing, employment, public safety, schools, and the very communities** I would return to. I was expected to rebuild my life, yet I was not recognized as a valid participant in the democratic process or in civic engagement.

That experience is why I founded Out for Justice in 2006—to support people navigating dead ends while trying to fully rejoin society and **to challenge the policies that keep justice-impacted people excluded long after their sentences end.** One of our earliest initiatives **focused on voter registration and education**, because I knew then, as I know now, that **true reintegration requires full civic participation.**

Our work has always been grounded in the belief that people are more than their convictions. Out for Justice helped launch Ban the Box in Maryland, opening doors to employment by removing unnecessary barriers on job applications. That work laid the foundation for later reforms, including the **Value My Vote Act**, which restored voting rights to tens of thousands of Marylanders. Each of these victories affirmed a simple truth: when people are trusted, included, and given a stake in their communities, everyone benefits.

Right now, Maryland law disenfranchises people from voting while they are serving a prison sentence for a felony conviction, even though research shows that excluding people from the democratic process has lasting negative effects on civic identity, community connection, and



public safety. **Restoring voting rights immediately—even while someone is incarcerated—acknowledges the humanity of people behind bars and supports their reintegration into society once released.**

SB89/HB52 builds directly on the foundation of our past reforms. By expanding voter eligibility to individuals serving felony sentences and creating a toll-free voter hotline to ensure access to accurate information and voting materials, this bill affirms that democracy should not be conditional and does not end at the prison gate.

Voting is a fundamental human right and the cornerstone of democracy. It affirms personhood, agency, and belonging—especially for people who have been pushed to the margins. Justice-impacted individuals are parents, partners, children, and neighbors. They care deeply about the safety, health, and future of the communities and families they will return to. **It is a misnomer to believe that only some people want safe environments or the best for their loved ones.**

We also know that being civically minded and experiencing a sense of belonging are key factors in reducing recidivism and increasing public safety. **Disenfranchisement does not promote accountability, rehabilitation, or healing. Inclusion does.**

SB89/HB52 helps separate the punitive consequences of detention and incarceration from basic human rights, including participation in our democracy. It sends a powerful message that Maryland believes in redemption, responsibility, and shared investment in our collective future.

For these reasons, Out for Justice and I strongly support SB89/HB52, and I respectfully urge this Committee to issue a favorable report.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Trina Selden
Founder and Executive Director
Out For Justice

SB 89 - SWASC - Vote Enfranchise - FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: UM SWASC

Position: FAV

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SENATE BILL 89
Election Law - Incarcerated Individuals - Voter Hotline and Voting Eligibility
Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
February 11, 2026

Social Work Advocates for Social Change strongly supports SB 89, which would restore the right to vote for all incarcerated individuals in Maryland and establish a toll-free voter hotline to access voter information, request election materials, and report voting violations. If enacted, this bill will strengthen Maryland’s democratic process by being a more accurate representation of all the state’s residents and upholding every resident’s inalienable right to vote as a U.S. citizen, rather than a privilege permitted to those deemed worthy.

SB 89 is a critical step in Maryland’s ongoing effort to strengthen democracy.

Historically, the United States has restricted voting rights to a privileged few, with voting initially being a privilege granted solely to White men. Over time, our country has made progress towards creating a true and equal democracy by expanding voting rights to all races and genders of voting age. Nevertheless, even as voting and other rights were extended, the carceral system was used to curtail them.¹ While Maryland has made substantial progress – restoring the right to vote for people with past felony convictions upon release from incarceration² – the work is not done: Maryland citizens currently serving a prison sentence for a felony conviction remain disenfranchised. SB 89 helps Maryland establish itself as a state that allows and encourages *every* individual to understand and participate in the systems that govern them.

Voter disenfranchisement is not only antithetical to the principles of the U.S. Constitution; it also undermines Maryland’s efforts to improve public safety.

Research consistently shows that access to voting and participation in civic life are associated with positive outcomes, including reduced recidivism, increased prosocial behavior, and stronger community ties.³ Conversely, restricting voting rights has been shown to ostracize justice-impacted individuals, create psychological harm, and weaken perceptions of belonging – factors that make successful reintegration more difficult.⁴

Voter disenfranchisement disproportionately impacts communities of color. Black people in particular are starkly overrepresented in Maryland prisons, comprising 71% of the prison population, despite making up only 29% of the general population.⁵ This disparity is evident nationwide, and has resulted in one in every 22 Black adults being politically disenfranchised.⁶ Excluding a community from using their political voice undermines democracy, perpetuates inequality, and limits the political influence of marginalized communities.

SB 89 recognizes that incarceration does not negate an individual's identity and affirms voting as a vital form of civic connection. While those experiencing incarceration are physically separated from society, they remain an integral part of it. The over 16,000 individuals serving a sentence in one of Maryland's state correctional facilities are family members, community participants, and potential voters.⁷ For many of these individuals, voting means taking part in community action, voting in favor of their child's best interest, and making a difference in the society they are working to rejoin. While voting can be easily taken for granted, for individuals serving a prison sentence, voting is an essential part of staying connected to family and community and establishing a positive civic identity.⁸

By affirming voting as a fundamental right for all Marylanders, SB 89 strengthens democracy, promotes public safety, and ensures that incarceration does not sever an individual's connection to their community or their voice in shaping its future. For these reasons, **Social Work Advocates for Social Change urges a favorable report on SB 89.**

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.

¹ Alexander, M. (2010). *The new Jim Crow: Mass incarceration in the age of colorblindness*. The New Press.

² Brennan Center for Justice. (Nov 4, 2020). Voting Rights Restoration Efforts in Maryland. <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/voting-rights-restoration-efforts-maryland>

³ Sentencing Project. (2023). Increasing Public Safety by Restoring Voting Rights. <https://www.sentencingproject.org/policy-brief/increasing-public-safety-by-restoring-voting-rights/>

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Prison Policy Initiative. Maryland profile. <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/profiles/MD.html>

⁶ Sentencing Project. (2024). Voting Rights in the Era of Mass Incarceration: A Primer. <https://www.sentencingproject.org/policy-brief/voting-rights-in-the-era-of-mass-incarceration-a-primer>

⁷ Maryland Department of Legislative Services. 2025. FY26 Budget Analysis – DPSCS: Corrections. <https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/pubs/budgetfiscal/2026fy-budget-docs-operating-Q00B-DPSCS-Corrections.pdf>

⁸ Miller, B., & Spillane, J. (2012). Civil death: An examination of ex-felon disenfranchisement and reintegration. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1462474512452513>; Shineman, V. (2020). Restoring voting rights: Evidence that reversing felony disenfranchisement increases political efficacy. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01442872.2019.1694655>

MD_Testimony_HB52 - SB 89 - 2.9.2026.pdf

Uploaded by: Yehesuah Downie

Position: FAV



February 9, 2026

Testimony HB 52 / SB 89

Election Law - Incarcerated Individuals - Voter Hotline and Eligibility (Voting Rights for All Act)
Government, Labor, Elections Committee
Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

Re: Support for HB 52 / SB 89 to Restore Voting Rights to Individuals With Felony Convictions

On behalf of Campaign Legal Center (“CLC”), I am pleased to submit this testimony in support of HB 52 / SB 89 to restore voting rights to individuals convicted of felonies currently serving and add a voter hotline. I am providing this testimony at the invitation of Common Cause Maryland, a regulated lobbyist in the state.

My name is Yehesuah Downie, and I am the Restore Your Vote organizer for CLC’s Voting Rights program. CLC is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization, based in Washington DC, that works to protect and strengthen American democracy across all levels of government. Our Restore Your Vote program helps restore voting rights to people with past convictions by providing direct rights restoration services and empowering community leaders to understand and monitor implementation of rights restoration laws.

This bill would effectively end felony disenfranchisement in the State of Maryland. If passed, Maryland would join Vermont, Maine, Puerto Rico, and Washington, DC in eliminating this racist practice of felony disenfranchisement that serves no legitimate purpose within the criminal legal system and hinders rehabilitation and re-entry.

The United States is considered an anomaly amongst other democratic nations in its use of felony disenfranchisement. Out of 45 democratic nations, the United States is one of four nations that allows bans on voting after incarceration, and one of ten nations that allows bans on voting while incarcerated.¹ Maryland can be a better example for the country and lead the country in establishing a more inclusive and representative democracy.

Enfranchising incarcerated individuals is important for democratic accountability. Elected officials make consequential decisions every day that directly impact incarcerated voters: legislators make the laws that incarcerated voters are charged with breaking, district attorneys prosecute their cases, state judges adjudicate their cases, and sheriffs and other law enforcement police them on the streets and run the jails and prisons in which they are currently incarcerated. Incarcerated voters' exposure to the criminal legal system gives them a major stake in the outcome of public policy, and their participation is crucial if the ballot box is truly to be a site where we hold our elected officials accountable.

Still, despite these empirical facts and the experiences of incarcerated voters, felony disenfranchisement laws persist, and their history explains why. In many states, these laws were enacted after the Civil War and proliferated during the Jim Crow era with the explicit and open purpose of undermining the 14th and 15th Amendments.² Put simply, felony disenfranchisement exists and continues in the United States because of efforts to suppress voters and communities of color.³

This unfortunately rings true in Maryland, which has a history of delaying or obstructing progress toward equal voting rights for Black Marylanders. Maryland's 1867 Constitution allowed the state legislature to disenfranchise those convicted of "infamous crimes," and this language is still in the state's Constitution today.⁴ A handful of other states have similar language in their constitutions, and these terms were intentionally designed post-Reconstruction as a loophole to the promise of equal protection and political rights. Disenfranchising individuals who were convicted of "infamous crimes" allowed states to target and disenfranchise Black voters, and its use in Maryland's Constitution suggests the framers of the 1867 Constitution had that intent. Indeed, just a few years later, in 1870 the Maryland legislature rejected ratification of the 15th Amendment, which prohibits denial of the right to vote based on race and granted voting rights to Black men.⁵ Shamefully, Maryland was one of the last states to ratify the Fifteenth Amendment, which it did not officially ratify it until 1973.⁶

¹ Britannica ProCon.org, *International Comparison of Felon Voting Laws* (last updated July 20, 2021), <https://felonvoting.procon.org/international-comparison-of-felon-voting-laws/>.

² Jennifer Rae Taylor, *Jim Crow's Lasting Legacy at the Ballot Box*, The Marshall Project (Aug. 20, 2018), <https://www.themarshallproject.org/2018/08/20/jim-crow-s-lasting-legacy-at-the-ballot-box>.

³ Erin Kelley, *Racism & Felony Disenfranchisement: An Intertwined History*, Brennan Center for Justice (May 9, 2017), <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/racism-felony-disenfranchisement-intertwined-history>; George Brooks, *Felon Disenfranchisement: Law, History, Policy, and Politics*, 32 Fordham Urban L.J. 101 (2005), <https://ir.lawnet.fordham.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?httpsredir=1&article=2140&context=ulj>.

⁴ Md. Const. art. I, § 4.

⁵ Baltimore & the Fifteenth Amendment, May 19, 1870 (1996), <https://msa.maryland.gov/dtroy/project/ratify/>; The Story of the 15th Amendment in Maryland (1996), <https://msa.maryland.gov/dtroy/project/story.html#:~:text=The%2015th%20Amendment%20would%20force,their%20support%20for%20black%20suffrage>.

⁶ Baltimore & the Fifteenth Amendment, May 19, 1870 (1996).

Maryland’s felony disenfranchisement system still carries the legacy of this history, as Black citizens in Maryland are disenfranchised at a rate six times that of white citizens, and Latinx citizens are disenfranchised at a rate of over twice that of white citizens.⁷ Black Maryland residents are incarcerated in state prisons at 5.3 times the rate of white Maryland residents, and because of this, the state’s felony disenfranchisement laws overwhelmingly silence the voices of Black voters.⁸ Felony disenfranchisement and its racist roots are a stain on our democracy. HB 52 / SB 89 will erase this exclusionary electoral feature and restore the right to vote to thousands of voters from the state.⁹

A system of universal enfranchisement also protects against *de facto* disenfranchisement—i.e., the process by which confusion and misinformation around voting after a felony conviction leads many people with past convictions—and election officials—to believe wrongly that they cannot vote, even if they are eligible.¹⁰ To combat this, HB 52 / SB 89 will create a simple, bright line rule that improves election administrability.

In sum, HB 52 / SB 89 is Maryland’s opportunity to join a growing number of states that are working toward restoring voting rights to citizens with past convictions,¹¹ and to become a national leader on the issue. HB 52 / SB 89 will eliminate the outdated, discriminatory, and anti- democratic practice of felony disenfranchisement, will solidify ballot access for incarcerated voters, and will affirm Maryland’s commitment to the principle that democracy works best when all eligible voters can participate. We urge you to take this important step and support HB 52 / SB 89.

Respectfully submitted,

Yehehuah Downie

Campaign Legal Center

1101 14th St. NW, Suite 400

Washington, DC 20005

⁷ The Sentencing Project, Christopher Uggen, Ryan Larson, Sarah Shannon, & Robert Stewart, *Locked Out 2022: Estimates of People Denied Voting Rights* (Oct. 25, 2022) (showing higher rates of disenfranchisement for Black and Latino Maryland residents than the overall disenfranchisement rates).

⁸ Prison Policy Initiative, https://www.prisonpolicy.org/blog/2023/09/27/updated_race_data/#compare;see_also Ashley Nellis, The Sentencing Project, *The Color of Justice: Racial and Ethnic Disparity in State Prisons 21* (2021), [The-Color-of-Justice-Racial-and-Ethnic-Disparity-in-State-Prisons.pdf](https://www.sentencingproject.org/publications/the-color-of-justice-racial-and-ethnic-disparity-in-state-prisons) (sentencingproject.org).

⁹ *See id.* at 16.

¹⁰ *See* Erika Wood & Rachel Bloom, *De Facto Disenfranchisement*, Am. Civil Liberties Union & Brennan Ctr. for Justice 2-5 (2008), <https://www.aclu.org/other/de-facto-disenfranchisement>.

¹¹ *See* National Conference of State Legislatures, *Felon Voting Rights* (Feb. 9, 2023), <https://www.ncsl.org/elections-and-campaigns/felon-voting-rights>.

SB0089 Votes for Convicted Felons UNF.pdf

Uploaded by: SHARON CARRICK

Position: UNF



February 9, 2026

The Honorable Bryan J. Feldman, Chairman
And Members of the Education, Energy and the Environment Committee
Senate of Maryland
Annapolis, Maryland

Dear Chair Feldman and Members:

RE: **SB0089** – Election Law -- Incarcerated Individuals -- Voter Hotline and Voting Eligibility
(Voting Rights Act for All) -- **UNFAVORABLE**

The 1,300 members of the Maryland Federation of Republican Women strongly oppose SB0089 that will grant convicted felons the right to vote while incarcerated.

- Loss of voting rights is a form of punishment, one of the main purposes of sentencing.
- The loss of one's right to vote while incarcerated for a felony conviction is a punitive measure intended to discourage the incarcerated offender from committing future crimes.
- Depending on the degree to which the offender values the right to vote, the loss of that opportunity provides an incentive for a successful reintegration into the community upon release from incarceration.
- Felons sentenced to long periods of incarceration do not have the same experiences and community influences that non-incarcerated individuals have. This greatly restricts their understanding of what is happening in the community, constraining their ability to make an informed decision when voting.
- Incarceration does not represent a permanent loss of voting rights. That opportunity is restored upon release from incarceration

We believe that a felon's loss of voting rights is an important component of the punitive purpose of incarceration, and encourage an **UNFAVORABLE** report for **SB0089**.

Sincerely,

Ella Ennis
Legislative Co-Chair
(443) 295-3989

Sharon Carrick
Legislative Co-Chair
(301) 464-1954

HB0052_SB0089_ Election Law - Incarcerated Indivi

Uploaded by: Trudy Tibbals

Position: UNF

[HB0052/SB0089](#): Election Law - Incarcerated Individuals - Voter Hotline and Voting Eligibility (Voting Rights for All Act**):** Please advocate **TO OPPOSE** this bill.

Dear Government, Labor & Elections Committee and Education, Energy, & the Environment Committee:

I am writing to respectfully **oppose HB 0052/SB 0089**, the **Voting Rights for All Act**.

While protecting lawful voting rights is important, this bill raises **serious concerns regarding election integrity, administrative burden, and clarity in the enforcement of eligibility standards**. Expanding voting-related services within correctional settings—particularly through a dedicated voter hotline—creates unnecessary complexity and risk in an area where **precision, verification, and public confidence are essential**.

Maryland already has clear laws governing **who is eligible to vote and when voting rights are restored**. **HB 0052/SB 0089** blurs those lines by introducing new mechanisms that could **confuse eligibility rules, invite inconsistent application across facilities, and strain local election officials** who are ultimately responsible for administering secure and accurate elections.

Election systems depend on **clear accountability and uniform procedures**. Establishing specialized outreach and assistance programs inside correctional institutions—without robust safeguards, standardized training, and clear limits—**risks errors** that could undermine confidence in election outcomes. Even unintentional mistakes in voter eligibility can have **serious legal and public-trust consequences**.

Additionally, this bill places **new administrative and financial burdens** on local election boards without demonstrating a clear need or showing that existing processes are inadequate. **Maryland should prioritize election security, clarity, and consistency**, not expand programs that complicate enforcement of the law and divert limited resources from core election functions.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge you to **oppose HB 0052/SB 0089** and protect the integrity, clarity, and public confidence of Maryland's election system.

Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration.

Respectfully,
Trudy Tibbals