



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