

Feb. 9, 2026

HB-52 Testimony of Victor Thuronyi in Support of Enactment

I support enactment of HB52, which deletes the rule denying the right to vote to a person who “has been convicted of a felony and is currently serving a court–ordered sentence of imprisonment for the conviction.”

Felony disenfranchisement should be seen as the last vestige of denying the right to vote to people who are not considered part of the dominant group in society. In the American colonies, the right to vote was initially limited mostly to White men who owned property. Not until 1920 was the right to vote extended to women. In the post-Reconstruction period, southern States enacted various rules to deny the right to vote to Blacks (and to some extent poor Whites).¹ For example, the rules disenfranchising those convicted of a crime were expanded in a constitutional convention held in Alabama in 1901 with the avowed purpose of “establish[ing] white supremacy in this State.”²

Felony disenfranchisement should be repealed because every American’s voice should be heard.

Maryland should join the ranks of jurisdictions that have abandoned felony disenfranchisement, setting an example to be followed by other states.

Not only is there no good reason to deny the right to vote to those in prison, but any rule doing so complicates election administration and results in the practical disenfranchisement of many who have completed their time in prison. My personal experience in registering voters shows that many people are confused about the rules and think they are not eligible to register because of a felony conviction even if the law allows it. 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 bad policy. 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.

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¹ See for example the discussion in *Hunter v. Underwood*, 471 U.S. 222 (1985).

² See *id.*