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POSITION ON PROPOSED LEGISLATION

BILL: SB0241 — Corr. Servs.— Election Law – Individuals Released From State Correctional Facilities – Automatic Restoration of Voter Registration

FROM: Maryland Office of the Public Defender

POSITION: Favorable

DATE: March 30, 2026

The Maryland Office of the Public Defender urges a favorable report on Senate Bill 0241.

This Bill requires that each month Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services must transmit to the State Board of Elections a list of individuals who were released from a State correctional facility, with identifying information necessary to cross check voters rolls. The bill would then require the State Board of Elections:

1. To identify each individual who was registered prior to becoming incarcerated;
2. To promptly restore that individual's voting rights; and
3. To notify that individual that their rights have been restored.

The Office of the Public Defender supports this proposed legislation. Our clients, who have served their time and paid their debts to society, and who were previously registered to vote, should not have to jump through hoops to re-register. Facilitating the enfranchisement of our formally incarcerated clients will facilitate their reintegration into civic and political life—which in turn will contribute to their reintegration into other aspects of social life in positive and constructive ways. Moreover, our formally incarcerated clients have important contributions to the political debate based on their first-hand knowledge of the criminal justice system, poverty and other social factors which contribute to crime and violence. By facilitating their enfranchisement, our State can better ensure that our clients' often marginalized voices are heard by our elected officials.

Finally, the Bill should be supported for the more prosaic reason that it promotes efficiency. The Division of Public Safety and Correctional Services already has information necessary to re-register formerly incarcerated individuals. By automatically registering these individuals to vote, this Bill would cut out the cumbersome application process and reduce administrative burdens that weigh on both the State and our clients.

For the reasons articulated above, the Office of the Public Defender urges an favorable report on Senate Bill 0241

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

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