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TESTIMONY ON HB#/0052- POSITION: FAVORABLE

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

TO: Chair Wells, Vice Chair Kerr, and members of the Government, Labor and Elections 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 HB#/0052, **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

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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 HB#/0052.