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House Government, Labor, and Elections Committee
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Testimony from the Maryland State Chapter of the
National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws (NORML)

SUPPORT HB0052
Election Law - Incarcerated Individuals - Voter Hotline and Voting Eligibility
(Voting Rights for All Act)

Maryland NORML has no paid staff – we are entirely energized by a core group of citizen volunteers and more than 5,000 other Marylanders committed to ending marijuana prohibition and establishing a regulated cannabis commercial market for adults. I have never had any stake or investment of any kind in any cannabis enterprise, nor does anyone in my family, and I have never received any fee or remuneration for consulting with any cannabis enterprise. As an organization, we have worked to reform state and federal marijuana laws for more than 50 years.

Maryland NORML strongly supports House Bill 52, which affirms a fundamental democratic principle: incarceration should not sever a person’s connection to civic participation.

For decades, cannabis enforcement policies contributed significantly to felony convictions and incarceration, disproportionately affecting certain communities. Maryland has moved decisively toward cannabis reform yet the lingering civic consequences of past enforcement continue to exclude thousands of residents from the democratic process. HB 52 directly addresses that inequity by restoring voting eligibility to individuals serving felony sentences and by ensuring meaningful access to voting information through a dedicated voter hotline.

The bill is both practical and principled. By requiring the State Board of Elections to provide a toll-free hotline for incarcerated individuals, HB 52 moves beyond symbolic reform and ensures that voting rights are understandable, accessible, and enforceable. Clear information and accountability are essential if voting rights are to exist in practice rather than on paper.

Importantly, HB 52 recognizes that civic participation promotes rehabilitation, community connection, and long-term public safety. Allowing incarcerated individuals to register and vote reinforces the idea that democracy is inclusive. HB 52 is a necessary companion to justice system reform—ensuring that the people most affected by past criminalization are not permanently excluded from democratic life.

For these reasons and more, we urge a favorable report on HB0052.

M. Luke Jones, Maryland NORML