



OUT FOR JUSTICE

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SENATE BILL 322/HOUSE BILL 414: Courts - Jury Service - Disqualification

TO: Members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings and House Judiciary Committees

FROM: Dwan Burton, Deputy Director

DATE: February 10th, 2026

Dear Members of the Committee,

I am Dwan Burton, deputy director of Out for Justice (OFJ), a Baltimore-based grassroots organization founded in 2011 and led by people directly impacted by the criminal legal system. We support House Bill 414 because it addresses a form of perpetual punishment that serves no public safety purpose: permanently excluding people from jury service after they have completed their sentence.

OFJ works with individuals who have met the system's requirements. They completed their sentences, complied with supervision, returned home, and rebuilt their lives. Yet under current law, many are still barred from one of the most basic forms of civic participation.

House Bill 414 makes a reasonable correction. It limits jury disqualification to people who are currently serving a sentence, including incarceration, probation, or parole. It also preserves exclusions for people with pending felony charges and for convictions that directly undermine the justice system, such as perjury, witness intimidation, or jury intimidation. This bill does not weaken the courts. It updates the law to reflect fairness and common sense.

Permanent jury exclusion does not make communities safer. It reinforces the idea that a conviction defines a person forever, regardless of what they do afterward. That approach undermines rehabilitation and deepens distrust in the justice system, especially in communities that are already heavily impacted by policing and incarceration.

Jury service is one of the few ways everyday people directly participate in the justice system. When jury pools systematically exclude people with lived experience of the system, juries become less representative, and verdicts feel less legitimate to the communities most affected by them.

Senate Bill 322/House Bill 414 establishes that once the state has determined that someone has completed their sentence, there is no justification for continuing to deny them full civic participation. Reintegration only works when it is real, and civic inclusion is part of that process.

For these reasons, Out for Justice urges a favorable report. Thank you for your time and consideration.