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**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE
IN SUPPORT OF HB 53 – VOTING RIGHTS – IMPRISONED FELONS**

January 26, 2021

Get Money Out (GMOM) is an all-volunteer organization established eight years ago. We want all citizens to have equal access to the ballot and an equal say in governance. Through our grassroots actions, we have signed up over 9,000 supporters.

We support HB 53, which restores voting rights to imprisoned felons. While this breaks a long tradition, we believe that removal of voting rights from felons is unfair and counterproductive. The disenfranchisement of felons is tied up with the aftermath of the Civil War. Amendment XIIIⁱ (forbidding involuntary servitude) and Amendment XIV, Section 2ⁱⁱ (revoking the three-fifths language in the Constitution) both contain language that was used in the Jim Crow South to limit Black peoples' freedom and voting rights. These amendments are rightly viewed as having expanded democratic rights, but they did contain incentives to those who held white supremacist views to criminalize Black males in order to maintain a White monopoly on political power. Though we have barred prisoners from voting for a long time, that does not make the practice just.

We believe voting can help to reintegrate those who committed crimes by broadening their view of their place in society. We agree with Maryland's continuing exclusion from voting for those who directly commit crimes against the election system itself. Others who have committed crimes – even violent crimes – should be encouraged to vote and to become contributing members of the community. Electoral participation could be a factor in their successful reintegration when released from prison.

Maine, Vermont, the District of Columbia and at least 16 other nations allow imprisoned persons to vote.ⁱⁱⁱ The exercise of voting rights by imprisoned felons would have positive value. We hope the Ways and Means will issue a favorable report.

ⁱ “Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States....”

ⁱⁱ “...when the right to vote at any election for [federal office], the executive and judicial officers of a state, or the members of the legislature thereof, is denied to any of the [qualified] [male](#) inhabitants of such state ... , or in any way abridged, except for participation in rebellion, or other crime, the basis of representation therein shall be reduced....”

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.newsweek.com/which-countries-felons-vote-1405142>