



Dear Members of the House Ways and Means Committee,

This testimony is being submitted by Showing Up for Racial Justice Baltimore, a group of white folks working as part of a multi-racial movement for equity and racial justice in Baltimore City and Baltimore County. We are also working in collaboration with the Out for Justice. I am a resident of MD District 43. I am testifying **in support of House Bill 53**.

This bill would return the right to vote to all incarcerated individuals, specifically to individuals who are currently serving time for a felony charge.

There is a long history of denying black people the right to vote, from poll taxes, threats and acts of lynching, literacy tests, voter ID laws, and beyond. Today, one of the last vestiges of this history is still alive in Maryland: taking the right to vote away from those who are incarcerated. The practice of this is particularly problematic in Maryland, as a 2018 report by the Justice Policy Institute showed that 70% of Maryland's prison population was black compared to 31% of the state's overall population who are black (<https://www.baltimoresun.com/news/crime/bs-md-cr-black-prison-population-report-20191106-k4frv4ksfbfqrj6rnwt4biflua-story.html>). Therefore, denying the right to vote to folks actively serving felonies, disproportionately disenfranchises black people in the same way these historically racist actions were used to do so.

Given this terrible manifestation of systemic racism, one would assume the constituency that would be most concerned with this issue would be those incarcerated for the longest sentences. I know my legislator will try to fix any issue or wrong that is done to me by the state under the contract that failing to serve me properly may mean they lose my vote. Unfortunately, those who have had the most taken from them by the state (their freedom) are denied this privilege. At the same time, legislators still count incarcerated folks when it comes to apportioning districts. Why should they be denied the right to vote, while your power governance in a representative democracy in part derives from their contribution to the "people" portion of the phrase "will of the people?"

Finally, for some, it is engagement with the political process in an effort to make the state and country a better place that can give someone meaning for their lives. As legislators, I imagine you very much feel this way. Denying someone the right to vote is one way of telling those who are incarcerated that the meaning in their life cannot be derived by the effort to improve others lives in the very way you, as legislators, have elected to live your own.

It is for these reasons that I am encouraging you to vote in **support of House Bill 53**.

Thank you for your time, service, and consideration.

Sincerely,
Jonathan Smeton
3140 Ellerslie Avenue, Baltimore, MD 21218
Showing Up for Racial Justice Baltimore