



Maryland General Assembly
House Ways and Means Committee
January 26, 2021

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ADL (the Anti-Defamation League) is pleased to submit this testimony in **strong support** of ***HB 53, Election Law – Voting Rights – Imprisoned Felons***, which seeks to expand access to the ballot to all eligible voters in Maryland, regardless of their incarceration status.

As you may know, ADL is a leading anti-hate and civil rights organization that has been working to secure justice and fair treatment for all since its founding in 1913. We firmly believe that voting is the hallmark of our democracy, and proudly support efforts to fully restore the right to vote for all who are otherwise eligible.

HB 53 is one such measure that will ensure access to the ballot regardless of incarceration status in Maryland. This bill seeks to rid our state of racist felony disenfranchisement laws that originated from the Jim Crow era, sending a clear and unequivocal message that here in Maryland, we all must have a voice in how we shape our society.

Not only is expanding the ballot to eligible voters who are incarcerated a step towards strengthening our democracy, but it is also a matter of racial justice. Felony disenfranchisement laws were originally developed after the Civil War intentionally to weaken the political power of Black people who had until then been enslaved. To this day, due to racial bias at every stage of the criminal legal system, felony disenfranchisement laws continue to disproportionately affect Black people, who face harsher sentences than white people for the same offenses. Indeed, Black Marylanders represent 31% of state residents, but 52% of people in jail, and 69% of people in prison.

Importantly, the policies underlying HB 53 are not new. People who are incarcerated can already vote in two states — Maine and Vermont — as well as in Puerto Rico. Additionally, other countries have long been far ahead of the United States; Canada, Israel, South Africa, almost half of all European countries, and many others do not place restrictions on voting for people who are incarcerated.

Denying the right to vote to an entire class of citizens is deeply problematic to a democratic society and counterproductive to effective reentry. If a Marylander is eligible to vote, whether incarcerated or not, that right must be honored.

**We therefore urge the House Ways and Means Committee to give
HB 53 a favorable report.**