



National Voting in
Prison Coalition

Dear Chair Atterbeary and Ways & Means Committee,

We, the undersigned members and allies of National Voting in Prison Coalition (NVPC), encourage a favorable report on HB 627 & HB 1022.

The National Voting in Prison Coalition (NVPC) is a coalition of national and state organizations working to support national, state, and local campaigns to guarantee voting rights to persons completing their sentence inside and outside of prison and subjected to felony disenfranchisement. The NVPC's advocacy supports strategies to guarantee political rights for justice-impacted residents through expanding automatic voter registration policies to include prisons, jails, and probation and parole offices. NVPC members also work to guarantee ballot access for eligible voters in local correctional facilities to support and facilitate jail and prison voter registration and voting initiatives.

HB 627: Election Law - Automatic Voter Registration - State Correctional Facilities

The National Voting in Prison Coalition and allies urges a favorable report on HB 627, to ensure that the state automatically registers people to vote as they leave prison. We encourage the Maryland legislature to pass this bill with urgency in the 2024 legislative session. The bill would require Maryland's State Board of Elections to coordinate with the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services (DPSCS)- to register eligible individuals upon their release from prison as part of an expansion of the state's automatic voter registration (AVR) program.

Passing and implementing HB 627 will allow for the most often disenfranchised populations to have a voice at the polls, in how Maryland is governed, and how it's tax dollars are spent.

Voting rights are under attack in many parts of our country but passing HB 627 takes a step forward to expand access to the ballot. The right to vote is a cornerstone of our democracy, and it is stronger when more of us can cast a ballot. The National Voting in Prison Coalition is united around the common goal that voting rights must be accessible for all.

According to statistics from the Maryland Secretary of State's office, the program will facilitate voter registration for thousands of individuals annually who are released from state prisons.

Maryland first adopted statewide automatic voter registration in 2018. To date, the state's AVR program has largely relied on the public interaction with the department of motor vehicles to implement its automatic registration. HB 627 will allow for The Maryland Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services to join the Motor Vehicle Administration (MVA), Maryland Health Benefit Exchange (MHBE), local departments of social services, and the Mobility Certification Office (MCO) in the Maryland Transit Administration agencies to reach sections of the population less likely to drive.

HB 1022: Election Law – Incarcerated Individuals – Voting Eligibility and Access

The National Voting in Prison Coalition and undersigned allies also supports the passage of HB 1022 to guarantee the voting rights of all eligible Americans in our elections. As Maryland begins to consider rights restoration for incarcerated people, we encourage you to assess the importance of a true representative democracy, where we all have a fair say in the decisions that shape the lives of our children and families.

Americans have seen how our nation's prison system has been used to silence the voices of millions of Americans at the ballot box. According to the Sentencing Project, more than 16,000 Marylanders are currently disenfranchised due to criminal convictions in Maryland. It is time to give these Americans a voice in our democracy.

HB 1022 serves as a beacon of hope for Maryland's most silenced populations currently disenfranchised due to criminal convictions. These individuals, despite being most impacted by the criminal legal system, remain voiceless in our nation's electoral process. [Polling](#) by The Sentencing Project, Stand Up America, Common Cause, and State Innovation Exchange revealed that most Americans believe the right to vote should be an inalienable right for all Americans, extending to those who are currently serving sentences, both within and outside of prison walls.

HB 1022 is a long-overdue step towards fulfilling the promise of our democracy, where every American has a voice and a stake in shaping our nation's future. The National Voting in Prison Coalition and allies urges members of the House and Senate to join us in supporting this essential legislation and ensuring that all Americans can participate fully in our democratic processes.

HB 1022 comprises a series of transformative measures designed to eradicate disenfranchisement and empower marginalized communities, including:

- Expansion of voting rights to Marylanders completing their sentences inside prison;
- Establishes a Voting Rights Ombudsman for incarcerated people within the State Board of Elections to oversee the implementation and make recommendations to assist in facilitating voting by incarcerated individuals.
- Establishes a toll-free voter hotline for people in prison to receive information about voting, request voting materials, and report voting rights violations.

HB 1022 represents a bold step towards a more just and equitable society, where the right to vote is not a privilege reserved for a select few but a fundamental right guaranteed to all Americans. By dismantling the barriers that bar tens of thousands of Marylanders from participating in our democracy, we can move closer to realizing the true essence of American democracy – a system of government that truly represents the will of all its people.

Thank you for your consideration of these two important bills as critical steps towards an inclusive democracy.

Sincerely,

Arizona Asian American Native Hawaiian Pacific Islander for Equity (AZ AANHPI for Equity)

Campaign Legal Center

Colorado Criminal Justice Reform Coalition

Common Cause

Demos

Full Citizens Coalition

Human Rights Watch, US Program

Illinois Alliance for Reentry and Justice NFP

Legal Services for Prisoners with Children

NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc.

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Prison Policy Initiative

Prisonality Magazine

Stand Up America

The Sentencing Project