



The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

March 4, 2019

RE: Support Voting Rights for People after Incarceration

Dear Speaker Pelosi and Minority Leader McCarthy:

States across the country are reforming their felony disenfranchisement laws, and it is time for Congress to follow their lead by granting people released from prison an opportunity to vote in federal elections. The Democracy Restoration Act, a provision of H.R. 1- the For the People Act of 2019, acknowledges that people living in the community after completing their term of imprisonment should have an opportunity to participate fully in community life. **The Sentencing Project urges you to support the Democracy Restoration Act and oppose all amendments and/or a motion to recommit to remove this provision from H.R. 1.**

Voting promotes social responsibility and community engagement - all important aspects of successful reintegration after incarceration. A report published by The Sentencing Project in October, 2018 - [Expanding the Vote: Two Decades of State Felony Disenfranchisement Reform](#) - found 23 states had restored voting rights to 1.4 million people since 1997. (Florida voters' approval of a November ballot initiative ending lifetime disenfranchisement for 1.4 million people in that state brings the total number of people benefitting from reform to 2.8 million as of today.)

While these policy changes represent national momentum for reform of felony disenfranchisement laws, millions of people who are not incarcerated but living in the community either on probation, parole or after completing their sentence remain barred from voting. As thoughtful leaders supportive of criminal justice reform, I hope you agree that extending a second chance at civic engagement will help to build stronger communities and responsible citizens.

Attempts to undermine the Democracy Restoration Act with amendments to exclude people with certain criminal conviction will be costly for election offices. Forty-five states do not distinguish between felony offense types for disenfranchisement purposes. Creating multiple new categories of voting rights based on conviction type would be administratively burdensome for Boards of Election and confusing for citizens, some of whom would be subject to criminal penalties if they do not understand the nuances of the law and illegally vote.

The Sentencing Project urges the House of Representatives to uphold second chances and opportunities for redemption for people after incarceration. Pass the Democracy Restoration Act without amendment as part of HR. 1.

For questions, please contact Kara Gotsch, Director of Strategic Initiatives for The Sentencing Project, at kgotsch@sentencingproject.org or 202-628-0871.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Marc Mauer". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "M".

Marc Mauer
Executive Director

Cc: U.S. House of Representatives