



The Honorable Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

April 9, 2019

RE: Support for the Democracy Restoration Act

Dear Senator Cardin:

Research conducted by The Sentencing Project finds that the collateral consequences of incarceration affect millions of Americans prohibited from voting, some permanently, because of a felony record. 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 Sentencing Project applauds your introduction of the Democracy Restoration Act and looks forward to working with you to advance the bill through the Senate.

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 2018 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.) State changes have come about through various mechanisms, including legislative reform, executive action and ballot initiatives. Reforms highlighted in the report include:

- Alabama scaled back the number of crimes subject to disenfranchisement, impacting 76,000 people.
- California restored voting rights to certain categories of people on community supervision and to those with felony convictions incarcerated in jail, impacting 95,000 people.
- Maryland expanded voting rights to individuals on probation and parole, impacting 40,000 people.

While these policy changes represent national momentum for reform of felony disenfranchisement laws, too many states still prohibit voting by people who are not incarcerated but living in the community either on probation, parole or after completing their sentence. As a leader supportive of criminal justice reform, I know you agree that extending a second chance at civic engagement will help to build stronger communities and responsible citizens.

The Sentencing Project looks forward to working with Congress as it explores ways to improve the country's electoral system and reexamine the consequences of felony disenfranchisement policies. I urge the Senate to prioritize passage of the Democracy Restoration Act.

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