



March 2, 2021

Dear Representative:

**RE: Support H.R. 1 Amendment #14 - provisions to restore voting rights to all people with a criminal conviction**

The United States maintains far greater restrictions on [voting while in prison](#), and after incarceration, than any other democratic country in the world. Laws banning voting by people with felony convictions disenfranchised over 5 million people during the 2020 election. Your support for H.R. 1 and its provisions to end voting exclusions for people with convictions, including Representative Cori Bush's amendment to expand voting to people in prison, is an essential step to ensuring racial equity and strengthening democracy.

The Supreme Court of Canada has twice ruled in favor of protecting voting rights for people in prison, stating that the “denial of the right to vote on the basis of attributed moral unworthiness is inconsistent with the respect for the dignity of every person...” In the United States, our shameful history of linking voting eligibility to our criminal justice system is rooted in racial prejudice. When African Americans gained the right to vote following the Civil War, many states enacted literacy tests, poll taxes, and expanded the number of crimes classified as a felony. Each of these barriers was intended to prevent African Americans from voting. While the federal government officially outlawed some Jim Crow-era tactics in the Voting Rights Act (1965), felony disenfranchisement laws remain with us to this day.

Nationally, 39% of people disenfranchised in prisons are African American, whereas African Americans make up 13% of the nation's population. This disparity diminishes the voting power of the Black electorate as a whole. Establishing universal voting for people with felony convictions would prevent racial disparities in the criminal legal system from causing disparities in political representation.

The undersigned organizations urge you to support H.R. 1's provisions to expand voting eligibility to people with criminal convictions, and to vote in favor of Representative Bush's amendment to extend voter eligibility to people in prison.

See The Sentencing Project's publication, [Expanding Voting Rights to All Citizens in the Era of Mass Incarceration](#), for more details about voting in prison.

For questions contact Kara Gotsch, Deputy Director at The Sentencing Project, at [kgotsch@sentencingproject.org](mailto:kgotsch@sentencingproject.org) or Leigh Chapman, Senior Director, Voting Rights Program at The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, at [chapman@civilrights.org](mailto:chapman@civilrights.org).

The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights  
The Sentencing Project

Citizens United for Rehabilitation of Errants  
College & Community Fellowship  
Demos  
Legal Action Center  
National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers  
National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA  
National Immigration Project  
NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice  
Operation Restoration  
Peacebuilding Connections  
The Daniel Initiative  
The Gamaliel Network