



TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE

HB 1022 - Election Law - Incarcerated Individuals - Voting Eligibility and Access (Voting Rights for All Act)

POSITION: Support

By: Linda T. Kohn, President

Date: March 7th, 2024

The League of Women Voters of Maryland supports HB 1022 to expand and improve the way all citizens vote and have access to the ballot. LWVMD supports elections that are easy for the voter to understand, both in terms of how to vote and how their vote is counted, helps to ensure minority views and interests have some influence in selecting elected officials, and maximizes the power of each voter's vote.

Despite best efforts, the League recognizes there are current gaps in voting for those individuals serving sentences in prisons and jails across Maryland. Too often, the way they vote, if they're allowed to vote, is confusing, ill-explained, or offered in a way that the individual can not understand registration and voting procedures. It has been reported that many times, this is due to not understanding where or how this responsibility falls on Corrections.

HB 1022 does not seek to undermine our correctional system, its employees, or current Maryland voting eligibility. Instead, it will allow the State Board of Elections to work with our correctional officers to ensure greater participation throughout the voting season. This work will be done by SBE, who will be responsible for the drop-boxes, the materials, and the collections and work with the local boards to ensure a smooth process.

The League fully endorses the office of an Ombudsman position to ease the work that Corrections and the State Board of Elections have to do. It is imperative that with the number of people Maryland incarcerates, they have a resource to help with their civic rights. These voters cannot and should not rely on organizations like the League of Women Voters to fill the holes, know their rights, and then complete the paperwork. HB 1022 would bring the necessary measures a vulnerable community desperately needs so they can have full participation in their democracy.

The League has long since and will continue to uplift the voices and rights of marginalized communities in Maryland. HB 1022 would incorporate all state agencies to create a way to get as many voters access to the polls as possible.

LWVMD urges a favorable report on HB 1022.