

SUPPORT SB 91

MARYLAND ALLIANCE FOR JUSTICE REFORM

Working to end unnecessary incarceration and build strong, safe communities



TO: Chair Will Smith and Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

FROM: Phil Caroom, MAJR Executive Committee

DATE: January 28, 2020

Maryland Alliance for Justice Reform (MAJR) supports SB 91 to help returning citizens exercise their rights to vote.

By act of the Maryland General Assembly and as enforced by the Maryland Board of Elections, “effective, March 10, 2016, if you have been convicted of a felony and have completed serving a court-ordered sentence of imprisonment, you are eligible to register to vote.”

Currently, the Md. Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services (DPSCS) offers a handout at reentry seminars to most inmates within approximately 90 days before their release, advising them of this right. However, they do not currently distribute actual registration forms. Informally, DPSCS has advised that “it would be no more trouble to distribute the registration forms in addition to the handouts.”

(One possible increase in effort would involve distributing this information to inmates who currently do not attend the reentry seminars. However, MAJR suggests this would be a small burden on DPSCS as they still receive some paperwork prior to discharge and registration forms could be added to this paperwork.)

When a returning citizen leaves incarceration, she or he typically faces a long list of things to do for compliance with probation to comply with parole and/or probation and limited resources with which to do them. SB 91 would make it just a little bit easier to overcome the barriers to full citizenship. It has been said, “The most significant civil rights problem is voting. Each citizen's right to vote is fundamental to all the other rights of citizenship...” -Robert F. Kennedy.

For all these reasons, Maryland Alliance for Justice Reform urges a favorable report on SB 91.

NOTE: Phil Caroom joins this testimony on behalf of the Maryland Alliance for Justice Reform executive committee and not on behalf of the Maryland Judiciary.