

## SUPPORT HB 568

### MARYLAND ALLIANCE FOR JUSTICE REFORM

Working to end unnecessary incarceration and build strong, safe communities



TO: Chair Luke Clippinger and House Judiciary Committee  
FROM: Phil Caroom, MAJR Executive Committee  
DATE: February 11, 2020

Maryland Alliance for Justice Reform (MAJR) supports HB 568: 1) to help returning citizens with felony convictions exercise their rights to vote and 2) to bring Maryland government into compliance with existing laws as to citizens with misdemeanor convictions.

**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 with a felony conviction 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.

This second aspect of HB 568 also is important. **Under current Maryland law, a citizen convicted only of a misdemeanor is not barred from voting.** See Md. Code, Election Art., sec. 3-102 (b). Yet, the lack of absentee voting procedures has prevented these citizens from exercising their rights for many years. HB 568 simply directs that the Election Board extend the availability of such absentee voting (and related registration) to those who are incarcerated, giving them notice of this right and reporting back to the General Assembly on their efforts.

For all these reasons, Maryland Alliance for Justice Reform urges a favorable report on HB 568.

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*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.*