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Committee: Ways and Means
Testimony on: HB 627 Election Law – Automatic Voter Registration – State Correctional Facilities
Position: Favorable
Hearing Date: February 13, 2024

The Maryland Chapter of the Sierra Club urges a favorable report on HB 627. The bill designates the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services (DPSCS) as an automatic voter registration agency and requires the Department to register qualified individuals to vote when they are released from confinement at a State correctional facility.

The Sierra Club and its members advocate on behalf of both the natural and human environments, including promoting racial and social equity. As a grassroots organization, we believe that voting should be as accessible and convenient as possible for all individuals who are eligible to vote. This bill will make voter registration more accessible and convenient for returning citizens as they are released from confinement.

Since 2018 Maryland has required some government agencies to offer persons who interact with them an opportunity for voter registration. The agencies are the Motor Vehicle Administration (MVA), Maryland Health Benefit Exchange (MHBE), local departments of social services, and the Mobility Certification Office (MCO) in the Maryland Transit Administration. This bill expands the list of agencies to include the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services.

Individuals convicted of a felony do not have the right to vote while incarcerated but regain the right to vote when their incarceration ends unless the conviction was for buying or selling votes. This bill would make sure that released prisoners are informed that they have the right to vote and given an opportunity to register as they are released.

For these reasons, we urge a favorable report on HB 627.

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Founded in 1892, the Sierra Club is America's oldest and largest grassroots environmental organization. The Maryland Chapter has over 70,000 members and supporters, and the Sierra Club nationwide has over 800,000 members and nearly four million supporters.