

Charles S. Dutton

Marriottsville, Maryland

I am writing this statement in support of Senate Bill 488. I am extremely grateful to have the opportunity to share my thoughts and experience with you. As a former felon and longtime Maryland citizen, I can tell you first-hand that rehabilitating yourself after a criminal conviction is a difficult road to walk while avoiding the ever-present pitfalls of recidivism.

In my experience, the path to good citizenship comes from acceptance of responsibility. Responsibility is the guiding force behind an ex-offender's motivation to change his life. Give him a serious responsibility, and you give him a purpose. A purpose to get up in the morning. A purpose to be productive. A purpose to take care of his family. A purpose to be a good citizen. A purpose to be a member of the community. I feel strongly that restoring the right to vote to ex-offenders is a means of restoring purpose to their lives.

Is there any lawmaker reading this statement that does not feel at the very least uncomfortable that there are tens of thousands of Maryland citizens who have been back in their communities for years, who have been productive law-abiding citizens, part of Maryland's sustained labor force, who have paid their taxes, and yet still are not allowed to vote? In other words, the state takes our hard-earned money in taxes, but does not give us a voice in our representation. As lawmakers, you are all students of American history. You know that our country went to war over this very issue – taxation without representation.

This is just about one thing – basic fairness. If someone has paid his dues to society, has done his time, finished his sentence, completed a drug treatment program, enrolled in an education program, gotten a job, and paid his taxes – everything that the State of Maryland requires – then let this be the branch of government that says enough is enough. Let's stop this voter disenfranchisement now and restore voting rights to this group of Maryland citizens.

Fairness – that's all I'm talking about here. I trust you will do the right thing and pass the Maryland Voter Registration Protection Act.

Thank you for allowing me to share these thoughts with you.

Charles S. Dutton
Actor/Director
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