

## MARYLAND VOTER REGISTRATION PROTECTION ACT OF 2007

### Why Restoration Is Right

**A Problem of Great Magnitude:** Maryland denies the right to vote to over 111,000 people with criminal convictions. Three-quarters of disenfranchised people in Maryland are living in the community; almost half have completed their full sentence. More than half of the disenfranchised population is African-American, making the African-American rate of disenfranchisement more than twice that of the overall population

**Disenfranchisement Is Unfair and Undemocratic:** People who have completed their sentences and are back in their communities, working and paying taxes, deserve to have a voice in how those communities are run. Our democracy and our communities are stronger when all of our citizens' voices are heard.

**The Current Law Is Complicated and Confusing:** Maryland denies the right to vote to people who have been convicted of an "infamous crime" until the completion of their sentence, including incarceration, probation, parole, community service, restitution, and fines. But people who have been convicted of two or more "infamous crimes" must wait three years from the end of their entire sentence to vote, and people convicted of two or more crimes of violence never get their vote back, unless they're pardoned. The term "infamous crime" is also confusing; it is hard to know whether a particular crime is disenfranchising under Maryland law. The complexity of Maryland's law leads to widespread confusion among eligible voters and discourages voter registration and participation.

**Minor Crimes Result in Disenfranchisement.** Under current Maryland law, an "infamous crime" includes any crime, even a misdemeanor, with an element of fraud. For instance, selling artificially colored beer, falsely representing a business to be a beauty salon without a proper license, or deliberately labeling a crate of apples the wrong variety will cause someone to lose their right to vote. Maryland is one of only six states that disenfranchises people who have committed misdemeanors, and one of only two who do so even when the person never serves a day in jail. Voting is a fundamental right, and only the most serious crimes should forfeit that right.

### How the Maryland Voter Registration Protection Act Will Solve the Problem

**The Bill Will Simplify and Streamline the Law:** By giving back the vote to people when they have completed their sentences, the proposed bill would simplify the complicated current system: under the new law, anyone who is not in prison or on probation or parole can vote. The new bill also eliminates the outmoded category of "infamous crimes" and instead uses the criminal law's definition of serious crimes: only

felonies will be disenfranchising under the new law. This bill will make Maryland's democracy stronger by including more of our citizens' voices.

**The Bill Will Promote Public Safety:** Voting is an important part of making people feel connected to their communities, which in turn helps them avoid falling back into crime. Studies show that former felons who are effectively reintegrated into their communities are more likely to lead law-abiding lives.

**The Bill Will Move Maryland into the Mainstream.** Only twelve states, including Maryland, still deny the vote permanently to some of its citizens on the basis of criminal convictions. Only six states, including Maryland, deny the vote to people who have been convicted only of misdemeanors. Under the new bill, Maryland will join 19 other states that restore voting rights after completion of sentence. (An additional 19 states restore voting rights prior to completion of sentence, and two states – Maine and Vermont – never disenfranchise people with convictions.)