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February 12, 2021

Senator Andrea Stewart-Cousins
Majority Leader
188 State Street
Legislative Office Building, Room 907
Albany, NY 12247

Assemblymember Carl E. Heastie
House Speaker
Legislative Office Building, Room 932
Albany, NY 12248

RE: S.830/A.4448

Dear Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins and Speaker Heastie:

I write in support of S.830/A.4448, which would restore voting rights to New Yorkers upon release from prison.

For over 20 years it has been my honor to be a public servant to the citizens of Albany County as their District Attorney. I have long stood on the platform of prevention over prosecution. I support diversion efforts, re-entry initiatives, and common sense smart reform that actually makes our communities safer. Offenders returning to the community face many challenges, often including roadblocks of adequate housing, employment, education, and family or community reunification. For many years my Community Justice Outreach Office has focused on a Clean Slate model, which assists justice-involved citizens while transitioning from incarceration back into their communities.

I support the restoration of voting rights and I strongly believe that public safety is enhanced when people returning to their families and communities from prison have the opportunity and the resources to become fully participating members of the community, including the reduced recidivism that I believe will flow from allowing formerly incarcerated people to participate fully in our democracy.

I am thankful that Governor Cuomo chose to use his pardon power to restore voting rights to New Yorkers on parole, but I believe the pardon process should not be required to restore voting rights to a

formerly incarcerated person. Rather, voting rights restoration should be automatic when an individual has completed their sentence.

Criminal justice means more than arrests and convictions; it is also about ensuring that once people have served their time, they are given a chance for healthy reintegration into their community. All citizens should be permitted and encouraged to engage in carrying out civic duties. I join the chorus of advocates that have fought against disenfranchisement to echo the sentiment that voting rights are human rights in our democratic state and country.

For these reasons, I join with my colleagues and strongly urge the Legislature to codify and improve upon the Governor Cuomo's actions by passing S.830/A.4448

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "P. David Soares", written over a horizontal line.

P. David Soares
District Attorney
Albany County

cc: Hon. Andrew M. Cuomo
Governor of the State of New York
Senator Leroy Comrie
Assembly Member Daniel J. O'Donnell