

April 19, 2021

The Honorable Benjamin L. Cardin
509 Hart Senate Office Building
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Re: Election Officials Support the Democracy Restoration Act, S. 481

Dear Senator Cardin:

We are writing to express our support for the Democracy Restoration Act (DRA/S.481). We are a broad coalition of current and former election officials from 28 states, representing all levels of the electoral system. As the primary stewards of our federal, state, and local elections, we have dedicated our careers to ensuring that all eligible voters have an equal opportunity to cast a meaningful ballot.

Across the country, millions of otherwise eligible aspiring voters are denied the right to vote due to past convictions, even after they have completed their sentences and returned to their communities. At the same time, a confusing patchwork of laws erroneously disenfranchises even eligible voters. The DRA will create consistency, reduce confusion and *de facto* disenfranchisement, and uphold the democratic values we aspire to as election officials. Accordingly, we agree that it is crucial that the Senate take swift action on the DRA.

The DRA will Create Consistency

Currently, the voting rights of people with convictions vary depending on the states where they live, the offenses they were convicted of, and even the fines and fees that they owe. This variation confuses voters and election officials alike. Voters who were eligible to vote in one state may not be eligible when moving to a new state. Even within a single state, the rules can be complicated. Some states make confusing distinctions between probation and parole, state and federal convictions, or offenses committed on certain dates. And in states that require people to pay outstanding fines and court fees before regaining their eligibility, voters and election officials must often navigate archaic and confusing records systems to even determine how much someone owes. The current patchwork approach to rights restoration confuses voters and election officials alike. The DRA would promote consistency by creating a uniform national standard for federal elections.

The DRA will Reduce Confusion and De Facto Disenfranchisement

Felony disenfranchisement laws also create confusion, which can lead to *de facto* disenfranchisement of otherwise eligible voters. Election officials often lack a consistent means of communicating with the criminal justice system, leaving us in the dark and disenfranchising untold numbers of eligible voters, who refrain from voting out of fear of breaking the law. Indeed, turnout by eligible voters is markedly lower in neighborhoods with high levels of felony disenfranchisement. On the flipside, in extreme cases, these confusing laws can lead to people

inadvertently voting illegally, because both the voter and the relevant election officials were unaware that the person was forbidden from doing so. These laws can even disenfranchise people with no connection to the criminal justice system who happen to share a birthdate and a similar name with someone who does. Enacting the DRA would create a simple rule for federal elections that is easy to administer and promote trust in our elections.

The DRA will Promote the Values we Aspire to as Election Officials

Felony disenfranchisement laws are not just administratively unwieldy—they are inconsistent with the values we aspire to as election officials. These laws send people who are attempting to reintegrate into their communities the message that they are not truly welcome, and in turn undermine faith in our elections system. And as election officials, we are committed to protecting the right to vote and fighting discrimination. Felony disenfranchisement laws have a dark racist history and a significant disparate racial impact that make promoting true equality within our elections system difficult.

As election officials, we believe that our democracy functions best when it is truly open to all. By ending permanent disenfranchisement in federal elections for people with criminal convictions, the DRA would promote consistency, reduce confusion, and help our election system live up to the values we hold dear. Thank you for your advocacy on this issue. We look forward to the DRA becoming law.

Sincerely,

Richard D. Mahoney

Former Secretary of State, Arizona

Terri Hollingsworth

Circuit and County Clerk, Pulaski County, Arkansas

Dean C. Logan

Registrar-Recorder / County Clerk, Los Angeles County, California

Joe Paul Gonzalez

Clerk, San Benito County, California

Amber McReynolds

Former Director of Elections, Denver, Colorado

Miles Rapoport

Former Secretary of the State, Connecticut

Mark S. Earley

Supervisor of Elections, Leon County, Florida

Ion V. Sancho

Former Supervisor of Elections, Leon County, Florida

Aaron Ammons

County Clerk, Champaign County, Illinois

David Orr

Former County Clerk, Cook County, Illinois

Myla Eldridge

Circuit Court Clerk, Marion County, Indiana

Grant Veeder

Black Hawk County Auditor and Commissioner of Elections, Iowa

Patrick F. Gill

Woodbury County Commissioner of Elections, Iowa

Roxanna Moritz

Scott County Auditor and Commissioner of Elections, Iowa

Chris Biggs

Former Secretary of State, Kansas

Shenna Bellows

Secretary of State, Maine

Connor B. Degan

Town Clerk, Town of Hopkinton, Massachusetts

Leon Wright

Clerk, Van Buren Township, Michigan

Joan Anderson Growe

Former Secretary of State, Minnesota

Mark Ritchie

Former Secretary of State, Minnesota

Toni Johnson

Chair, Hinds County Election Commission, Mississippi

Sylvester Tate

Election Commissioner, Noxubee County, Mississippi

Jason Kander

Former Secretary of State, Missouri

Mike Cooney

Former Secretary of State and Lt. Governor, Montana

Rina Fontana Moore

Clerk and Recorder, Cascade County, Montana

Alan Cohen

Democratic Election Commissioner, Madison County, New York

Dustin Czarny

Democratic Election Commissioner, Onondaga County, New York

Ashley Dittus

Democratic Election Commissioner, Ulster County, New York

Judith Garrison

Democratic Election Commissioner, Delaware County, New York

Jerry Ryan

Democratic Election Commissioner, Fulton County, New York

James C. E. Wahls

Democratic Election Commissioner, Tioga County, New York

Gary O. Bartlett

Former Executive Director, State Board of Elections, North Carolina

Tim Burke

Former Chair, Hamilton County Board of Elections, Ohio

William D. Rich

Chair, Summit County Board of Elections, Ohio

Michael Zickar

Commissioner, Wood County Board of Elections, Ohio

Shemia Fagan

Secretary of State, Oregon

Phil Keisling

Former Secretary of State, Oregon

John Lindback

Former Director of Elections, Oregon

Nellie Gorbea

Secretary of State, Rhode Island

Chris Hollins

Former County Clerk, Harris County, Texas

Isabel Longoria

Elections Administrator, Harris County, Texas

James C. Condos

Secretary of State, Vermont

Edgardo Cortés

Former Commissioner of Elections, Virginia

Julie Wise

Director of Elections, King County, Washington

Natalie Tennant

Former Secretary of State, West Virginia

Maribeth Witzel-Behl

City Clerk, Madison, Wisconsin

Kevin J. Kennedy

Former Chief Election Officer, Wisconsin