

April 19, 2021

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

Re: Faith Leaders Support the Democracy Restoration Act, S. 481

Dear Senator Cardin:

We, the undersigned religious organizations and faith leaders, are writing to express our enthusiastic support for the Democracy Restoration Act (DRA/S.481). We are a broad coalition that represents a deep variety of faith communities across the country. As faith leaders, we believe all people are created in God's image and are deserving of redemption and forgiveness. We also believe that standing up for racial justice is part of putting our faith in action. Upon these beliefs, we agree that it is crucial that the United States Senate stand up against state felony disenfranchisement laws that deprive our neighbors of the fundamental right to vote.

Felony disenfranchisement laws affect more than five million members of our communities in the United States today. These laws perpetuate racial injustice and deny the opportunity for true redemption and forgiveness. For these reasons, we believe it is consistent with our democratic values and moral heritage to act swiftly on the DRA.

*Promoting Redemption and Forgiveness*

A common theme across our scriptures and religious texts is the moral necessity of providing redemption, forgiveness, and second chances. In fact, many of our texts bear witness to the great achievements of people who have spent time in prison. But instead of providing a welcoming hand and a second chance, felony disenfranchisement laws tell the people most affected by our criminal justice system that their voices do not matter and they are beyond redemption. Encouraging civic engagement as part of a healthy reentry to the community is the better path. This spirit of redemption and forgiveness is consistent with our democratic values and moral heritage. Studies have consistently found that voting and civic engagement encourage the right kind of healthy reintegration into our communities.

*Promoting Racial Justice*

We all believe confronting our nation's sinful history of systemic racism to be a crucial part of living our faith through action. Felony disenfranchisement is a dark part of that history. These laws are rooted in the period after the Civil War and ratification of the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> Amendments, when states looked for new ways to prevent Black people from voting and enforce white supremacy at the ballot box. This racist legacy lives on today: felon disenfranchisement laws affect Black and Latino people at disproportionately high rates. Today, faith communities across the country are speaking boldly against racial injustice. Our voices are united in a belief in the urgency of the DRA.

As faith leaders, we believe that no human is as bad as the worst thing they have done, and that all people are deserving of mercy and second chances. The DRA would undo a policy with a racist history and provide a crucial second chance by ending disenfranchisement in federal elections for people who have returned to their communities. Thank you so much for your continuing advocacy on this issue and sponsorship of the DRA for the past ten years. We look forward to working with you to get it passed.

Sincerely,

**Organizations**

**African American Ministers in Action**

**Allendale United Methodist Church, St. Petersburg, FL**

**American Friends Service Committee**

**Arizona Faith Network**

**Bend the Arc: Jewish Action**

**Bread for the World**

**Children of the Kingdom**

**Church World Service**

**Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, U.S. Provinces**

**DC Dorothy Day Catholic Workers**

**The Episcopal Church**

**Faith in Action**

**Faith in Action East Bay**

**Faith in Public Life Action**

**Faith in Texas**

**The Festival Center**

**Franciscan Action Network**

**Friends Committee on National Legislation**

**The Jewish Center for Justice**

**Leadership Conference of Women Religious**

**Masjid Muhammad, The Nation's Mosque**

**Missouri Faith Voices**

**National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd**

**National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA (NCC)**

**National Council of Jewish Women**

**NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice**

**New Moral Majority**

**Presbyterian Church (USA) Office of Public Witness / United Nations**

**Sisters of Mercy of the Americas Justice Team**

**Tzedek Association**

**Union for Reform Judaism**

**Unitarian Universalist Association**

**Unitarian Universalists for Social Justice**

**United Church of Christ Justice and Local Church Ministries**

**The United Methodist Church – General Board of Church and Society**

**Wisconsin Faith Voices for Justice**

**Individuals**

**Rev. Jennifer Butler**

CEO, Faith in Public Life Action

**Marie Dennis**

Senior Advisor, Pax Christi International

**Dr. Sabrina E. Dent**

Senior Faith Advisor, Americans United for Separation of Church and State

**Rev. Ryan M. Eller**

Beloved Community of Louisville, Co-Founder  
Executive Director, New Moral Majority

**Rev. Dr. Susan Frederick-Gray**

President, Unitarian Universalist Association

**Rev. Dr. Susan Henry-Crowe**

General Secretary, General Board of Church and Society

**Rev. Ashley Horan**

Organizing Strategy Director, Unitarian Universalist Association

**David W. Key, Sr.**

Founding Pastor, Lake Oconee Community Church, Greensboro, GA

**Rabbi Bonnie Margulis**

Executive Director, Wisconsin Faith Voices for Justice

**Sister Maria Orlandini**

Director of Advocacy, Franciscan Action Network

**Bishop Frank Madison Reid, III**

Third Episcopal District, African Methodist Episcopal Church

**Imam Dr. Talib M. Shareef**

U.S. Air Force – Retired  
Masjid Muhammad

**Dr. Warren H. Stewart, Sr.**

Chairperson, African American Christian Clergy Coalition, Phoenix Metro Area

**Jim Wallis**

Founder and Ambassador, Sojourners