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 14th and 15th 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