



The Honorable Jerrold Nadler  
Committee on the Judiciary  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Doug Collins  
Committee on the Judiciary  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

January 29, 2019

**RE: Broad coalition supports the Democracy Restoration Act provision of H.R. 1**

Dear Chairman Nadler and Ranking Member Collins:

As the House Judiciary Committee prepares to hear testimony regarding H.R. 1, the For the People Act of 2019, the Justice Roundtable<sup>1</sup> and its associated organizations write in support of the bill's provision – known as the Democracy Restoration Act - to extend federal voting rights to people with felony convictions.

When people leave prison and return to their community, they deserve a second chance to work, raise families, participate in community life and vote. The current patchwork of felony disenfranchisement laws across the country means that a person's right to vote in federal elections is determined simply by where they choose to call home. Congress must take action to fix this problem.

While disenfranchisement policies have been in place for many years, the number of persons subject to these laws has increased dramatically with the expansion of the criminal justice system over the last 40 years. Racial disparities in the criminal justice system translate into higher rates of disenfranchisement in communities of color. Thirty-four states disenfranchise people who are not incarcerated and are living in their communities either under supervision or have completed a felony sentence. The Democracy Restoration Act would restore federal voting eligibility to these citizens.

Recent bipartisan state efforts to scale back the impact of felony disenfranchisement are noteworthy. Florida voters in November passed a ballot initiative that reformed the state's century-old lifetime ban on voting for people with convictions, and in doing so restored the right to vote for approximately 1.4 million people. In March, approximately 43,000 Louisianans will have their voting rights restored, including some people on probation and parole, as a result of new legislation. Since 1997, 23 states have amended felony disenfranchisement policies in an effort to reduce their restrictiveness and expand voter eligibility.

People living in the community under probation or parole supervision or after completing their sentence take on the same responsibilities as other citizens living in their communities. The second chance they are afforded by release should extend to the ballot box.

A growing chorus of law enforcement officials and organizations, including police chiefs, corrections officials, and prosecutors, have called for the restoration of voting rights for people released from prison and convicted of felony offenses because it aids efforts for successful reintegration.

As the Committee reviews H.R. 1 and considers means to improve the country's electoral system, we urge you to prioritize passage of the Democracy Restoration Act. We look forward to working with you to advance this important legislation.

For questions, please contact Kara Gotsch at [kgotsch@sentencingproject.org](mailto:kgotsch@sentencingproject.org) or 202-628-0871.

Sincerely,

American Friends Service Committee  
American King Foundation  
Beauty after the Bars  
Braxton Institute  
Bread for the World  
Brennan Center for Justice  
CAN-DO Foundation  
College & Community Fellowship  
The Daniel Initiative  
Defending Rights & Dissent  
Drug Policy Alliance  
Healing Communities USA  
Human Rights Watch  
Innocence Project  
Interfaith Action for Human Rights  
International CURE (Citizens United for Rehabilitation of Errants)  
Justice Innovations  
Justice Programs Office, American University  
Justice Strategies  
JustLeadership USA  
Kemba Smith Foundation  
Leadership Conference for Civil and Human Rights  
Legal Action Center  
Life for Pot  
Mennonite Central Committee U.S. Washington Office  
Mommieactivist and Sons  
NAACP  
National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers  
National Association of Social Workers

National Black Justice Coalition  
National Center for Lesbian Rights  
National Council of Churches  
National HIRE Network  
Ohio Justice and Policy Center  
Planned Parenthood Federation of America  
Rich Family Ministries  
Safer Foundation  
The Sentencing Project  
StoptheDrugWar.org  
Students for Sensible Drug Policy  
The Taifa Group, LLC  
Treatment Communities of America  
T'ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights  
Union for Reform Judaism

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<sup>1</sup> The Justice Roundtable is a coalition of over 100 organizations working on federal criminal justice reform policy issues.