



Testimony for the House Ways & Means Committee

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HB 716 Election Law – Voting by Felons at Polling Places – Prohibition

OPPOSE

The ACLU of Maryland opposes HB 716, which would require persons convicted of a felony to note the conviction in their voter registration, require these persons to vote only by absentee ballot, and ban these persons from voting at schools.

HB 716 serves no practical purpose—the State Board of Elections has no practical need for information about individuals’ criminal records. Persons who have been convicted of a felony are fully re-enfranchised upon release, pursuant to HB 980, which the General Assembly passed in 2015 and overrode the Governor’s veto in 2016. These persons live in our communities, pay taxes, and should exercise their right to vote unfettered by the unnecessary parameters of HB 716.

Moreover, HB 716 would have a particularly negative impact on voters of color, who are entangled in the criminal justice system at rates disproportionate to their white counterparts. In addition to facing higher imprisonment rates, racial minorities, once arrested, are more likely to be convicted, and once convicted, are more likely to face longer sentences than their white counterparts.¹ Therefore, persons of color are disproportionately swept up in the criminal justice system and as a result, face felony convictions at higher rates.

For the foregoing reasons, the ACLU of Maryland urges an unfavorable report on HB 716.

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¹ The Release Valve; Parole in Maryland, Feb. 2009. Available at http://www.justicepolicy.org/uploads/justicepolicy/documents/maryland_parole.pdf. Accessed Feb. 23, 2015.