



Legislative Testimony  
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**Written Testimony Supporting  
House Bill 5418, An Act Restoring Electoral Privileges to  
Felony Convicts who are on Parole**

Senator McLachlan, Senator Flexer, Representative Fox, and distinguished members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee:

My name is Kaley Lentini, and I am legislative counsel for the American Civil Liberties Union of Connecticut (ACLU-CT). I am here to testify in support of House Bill 5418, An Act Restoring Electoral Privileges to Felony Convicts who are on Parole.

The right to vote is a fundamental part of America's democracy, and the government should not abridge that right lightly. Restoring the right to vote for people who have been disenfranchised strengthens our democracy by increasing voter participation and helping formerly incarcerated people to reintegrate into society.

As an organization that defends the right to vote and believes that enfranchisement is an incredibly important way for people to participate in America's democracy, the ACLU-CT supports this bill, which would allow formerly incarcerated people convicted of a felony who are on parole to vote. Being able to vote in elections is an incredibly important right that should not be denied to someone simply because they were convicted of a crime. More than six million Americans are currently disenfranchised due to a felony conviction. Laws that disenfranchise people because of felony convictions disproportionately disenfranchise Black Americans. In many states, they were in fact intended to have this racist effect; the modern practice of felony disenfranchisement became particularly widespread in the Jim Crow era, and after Reconstruction, white lawmakers codified felony disenfranchisement laws that explicitly targeted Black Americans to diminish their electoral strength.

This bill, combined with the Government Administration and Elections Committee's House Bill 5250, An Act Concerning Released Felons' Voting Rights, which would require the Commissioner of the Department of Correction to give people who are released from custody after a felony conviction, including people who are discharged from parole, a document certifying that they are "not barred from becoming an elector due to a previous felony conviction," provides a meaningful way to empower people to exercise their fundamental civic right to vote. By passing this bill, Connecticut would join Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New Hampshire, and ten other states plus the District of Columbia in affording people on parole their rights to vote. It would also bring Connecticut closer to the models set by Maine and Vermont, which protect incarcerated people's rights to vote.

Mass incarceration, combined with disenfranchisement laws, subverts participatory democracy, particularly for communities of color. Making the restoration process automatic when someone is returning to society, streamlining it, and notifying formerly incarcerated people of their right to vote, are the first steps to dismantling these harmful and discriminatory laws.

The ACLU-CT encourages the committee to support this bill, which would restore the voting rights of people who are on parole.