



Legislative Testimony
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**Written Testimony Supporting
Senate Bill 25, An Act Restoring Electoral Privileges to
Felony Convicts Who are on Parole**

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

My name is Gus Marks-Hamilton, and I am a Smart Justice organizer for the American Civil Liberties Union of Connecticut (ACLU-CT). I am submitting this testimony in support of Senate Bill 25, 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 Senate Bill 22, An Act Concerning Payment of Certain Fines Prior to the Restoration of Electoral Privileges, which would no longer condition the restoration of electoral privileges on the payment of fines in conjunction with a disenfranchising conviction, provides a meaningful way to empower people to exercise their fundamental civic right to vote. By passing this bill, Connecticut would join Florida, 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, and New Mexico, which is considering such a law.

Mass incarceration, combined with disenfranchisement laws, subverts participatory democracy, particularly for communities of color. Restoring the right to vote for people on parole is the first steps to dismantling these harmful and discriminatory laws.

The ACLU-CT strongly encourages the committee to support Senate Bill 25.