



Legislative Testimony
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**Written Testimony Supporting Senate Bill 53,
An Act Concerning Electoral Privileges for Incarcerated Individuals**

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 here to testify today in support of Senate Bill 53, An Act Concerning Electoral Privileges for Incarcerated Individuals.

This bill would restore the right to vote to people who are incarcerated who have been convicted of a felony. The right to vote is a fundamental aspect of democracy. Americans should not lose the precious right to vote when convicted of a crime. Restoring the right to vote for people who are incarcerated strengthens our democracy and helps to connect people who are incarcerated to their communities. As an organization that believes that enfranchisement is an integral way for Americans to participate in the democracy that governs them, the ACLU-CT supports this bill.

According to a report by the Council of State Government's Justice Center, there are twice as many Black and Hispanic people as white people in Connecticut prisons. This is despite the fact that white people outnumber Black and Hispanic people by an almost 3-to-1 ratio in our general population, demonstrating the racial disparities in Connecticut's criminal justice system. Voter disenfranchisement of people who are incarcerated therefore disproportionately impacts racial minorities. Felony disenfranchisement was intended to have this impact in some states. Following the Reconstruction period, white lawmakers codified felony disenfranchisement laws that explicitly targeted Black Americans to diminish their electoral strength.

California now allows people convicted of felonies and serving their sentences in county jails to vote. Maine, Vermont, and Puerto Rico have already fully restored the right to vote to people who are incarcerated. It is time that Connecticut takes the same step in strengthening its democracy.

Mass incarceration, combined with disenfranchisement laws, subverts participatory democracy, particularly for communities of color. Restoring the right to vote for people who are incarcerated is a key step in dismantling these harmful and discriminatory laws.

The ACLU-CT strongly encourages the committee to support Senate Bill 53.