

April 15, 2015

By USPS & Facsimile

The Honorable Larry Hogan
Governor of Maryland
100 State Circle
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
(f): 410.974.3275

RE: Senate Bill 340 – Restoration of Voting Rights to People with Felony Convictions

Dear Governor Hogan:

As a Maryland resident and President and Director-Counsel of the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund (LDF), I write to respectfully urge you to sign Senate Bill 340, which restores voting rights to individuals with felony convictions as they complete a sentence of parole or probation and seek to fully integrate and contribute to communities around the State.

Signing SB 340 into law – and providing nearly 40,000 Marylanders with the opportunity to regain their right to vote – would help to bring the state’s election laws into greater conformity with fundamental principles of an inclusive democracy. Maryland would join the growing list of more than 20 states that have engaged in legislative efforts to free the vote for people, particularly people of color, with criminal convictions. Enacting SB 340 also would demonstrate your commitment to voting rights and second chances for people with criminal convictions in this 50th anniversary year of Bloody Sunday, where extraordinary people sacrificed life and limb to demand the right to vote, resulting in the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the nation’s seminal civil rights legislation.

Since its founding in 1940, by Thurgood Marshall, who was born in Baltimore and is one of Maryland’s (and the nation’s) greatest treasures, LDF has been a leader in the struggle to secure, protect, and advance voting rights for African-American people. LDF has worked to reform the nation’s antiquated and discriminatory felony disfranchisement laws, which were adopted and proliferated in the late 19th century and during the era of Jim Crow to bar newly freed African-



American citizens from their right to vote for felony crimes disproportionately enforced against them.¹

The modern day impact of felon disenfranchisement laws on communities of color is clear. Nationwide, one in 13 African American people cannot vote due to disenfranchisement policies.² In Alabama alone—where the sacrifices of ordinary people gave birth to the Voting Rights Act—one in three African-American males has been disqualified from voting as a result of a conviction.³ In Maryland, approximately 15 percent of African American men are disenfranchised, as compared to 4 percent for the Maryland population as a whole.⁴ And over 60 percent of disenfranchised people who have completed incarceration in Maryland are African-American people.⁵ Because our democracy and the communities within it are stronger and healthier when more people participate in the political process and have a voice in their communities, LDF has litigated several challenges to discriminatory felony disenfranchisement state laws that disproportionately deny voting rights to people of color with criminal records, including in Alabama, New York, and Washington State.

LDF, like the Maryland legislators supporting SB 340, understands that providing opportunities to vote and participate in the political process provide all of the people who live, work, and raise families in Maryland a sense of belonging and the ability to contribute to their communities. Restoration of voting rights for people with felony convictions also is a common sense public safety reform given the well-documented research that participating in the political process decreases the likelihood of reoffending.⁶ Because SB 340 promises to restore full citizenship to

¹ See generally, NAACP LDF, *Free the Vote: Unlocking Democracy in the Cells and on the Streets*, <http://www.naacpldf.org/files/publications/Free%20the%20Vote.pdf>

² Christopher Uggen and Sarah Shannon, *State-Level Estimates of Felon Disenfranchisement in the United States, 2010*, at p. 1, http://sentencingproject.org/doc/publications/fd_State_Level_Estimates_of_Felon_Disen_2010.pdf

³ The Sentencing Project, *Losing the Vote: The Impact of Felony Disenfranchisement Laws in the United States*, at p. 8, http://www.sentencingproject.org/doc/file/fvr/fd_losingthevote.pdf

⁴ *Id.* at 9.

⁵ *Supra* n. 2, at 16-17.

⁶ See, e.g., Christopher Uggen and Jeff Manza, *Voting and Subsequent Crime and Arrest: Evidence From a Community Sample*, 36 Colum. Hum. Rts. L. Rev. 193, http://as.nyu.edu/docs/IO/3858/Voting_and_Subsequent_Crime_and_Arrest.pdf

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Page 3 of 3



tens of thousands of Marylanders and reduce reoffending rates, this is a win-win reform effort for all residents of our great state. This also coincides with efforts at the federal level, led by Maryland Senator Ben Cardin, to restore federal voting rights to those convicted of crimes.

Thank you for considering this request. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact Monique Dixon at mdixon@naacpldf.org, Leah Aden at laden@naacpldf.org, or me.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sherrilyn A. Ifill". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Sherrilyn A. Ifill
President and Director-Counsel
NAACP Legal Defense & Educational
Fund. Inc.

cc (by email): Christopher B. Shank, Executive Director
Governor's Office of Crime Control and Prevention