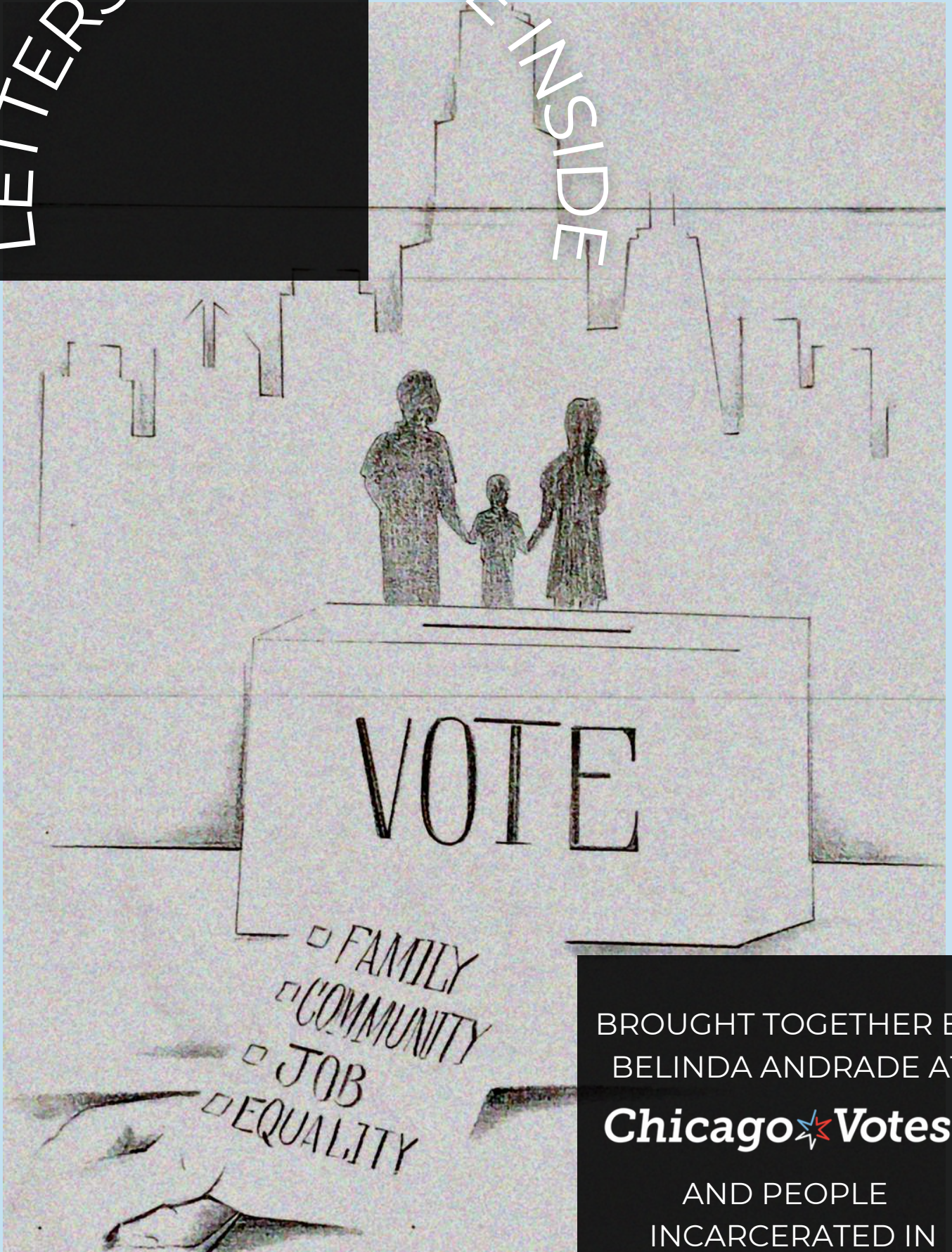


LETTERS FROM THE INSIDE



ARTWORK BY PETER SAUNDERS

BROUGHT TOGETHER BY
BELINDA ANDRADE AT

Chicago★**Votes**

AND PEOPLE
INCARCERATED IN
ILLINOIS PRISONS

BACKSTORY

Chicago Votes was founded with a simple mission: break down barriers young people face to civics participation. Among the many barriers young people face is contact with the legal system.

Young people are overrepresented in jails and prisons throughout the United States.

43%
**OF PEOPLE IN
ILLINOIS PRISONS ARE
UNDER 35 YEARS OLD**

The goal is clear.

...ions, neither should be allowed to
...ve now seen there are a number of
...nd responsible ways to cast ballots in the
...o extend those efforts to incarcerated
...ould be on every official running for
...or we find ones who will. This would
...es to address prison reform, ^{unsafe} conditions

The right to vote will also afford someone
with a worthless feeling an opportunity to do good work.
A human without purpose can lose themselves faster
than any other creature. We all want to feel like
we are needed, and that we are contributing.
This bill could be just the thing to bring more
incarcerated people to positive work.
The fact that our government doesn't

...ive role in the politics that form the
...y live in. Being considered a second class
...izen by your own state is detrimental to
...le of society.
Article I, Sec. II, of the Illinois consti-
...tes as follows: "All penalties shall be determine
...ording to the seriousness of the offense and
...ective of restoring the offender to useful citizen-
...is statement is completely overlooked when
...versation of voting rights for offenders."

We have to restore voting rights to people in prison. Senate Bill 828 would restore voting rights to people in prison.

...hemselves faster
...at to feel like
...e contributing.
...hing to bring more
...e work.
...ment doesn't
...ts my need, makes
...class citizen does
...presentation. This

our Crimes DDJWANK BUDS #R210343
P.O. BOX 112
...reason why
...to have the right to vote, on
...25, 2021
...are filled with black and
...reason is that

...this right to vote, taking it
...is to violate his or her rights.
...comes incarcerated they are still a
...state doesn't take away from
...is doing, what is needed to
...ful citizenship; they should be treated

...ording to the Se
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...then the right to
...meaningful step
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...ffect the daily

People in movement spaces know that the most important rule of organizing is centering those most impacted. In this case, the people most impacted are those currently behind bars.

...which puts us in the peger deny them of their right to hunt
...educate/enlighten others
...it is to use our voting
...would ensure that they and their c
...would fight for bringing the nee
...to their communities. Many people o

We put out a simple request to our community members in Illinois prisons:

***Tell us why Illinois should pass
Senate Bill 828,
Voting in Prison.***

The responses have been outstanding.

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PETER SAUNDERS

Peter Saunders #B-00118
Dixon Correctional Center
2600 N. Brinton Avenue
Dixon, Illinois 61021

To Vote or not to Vote, has for centuries been the driving force behind change and/or subjugation. To Vote comes from a progressive ideology rooted in democracy, while not to Vote has favored oppression and control. At a time when this very fundamental human right is under siege, every effort should be made to ensure all Americans (let alone human beings), are afforded the right to Vote.

As a Black man who has been incarcerated the better part of his life (35 years), I see both the need and the benefits of voting from a unique perspective. From a historical standpoint there's precedent;

- In 1857 the Supreme Court's ruling in [Dred Scott v. Sandford 60 U.S. (How.19)393(1857)] states; "The Black man has no rights which the white man is bound to respect."
- In 1866 the Thirteenth Amendment's Civil Rights Act abolished slavery, bestowing full citizenship upon African Americans.
- Despite the Thirteenth Amendment's Civil Rights Act the courts ruled in 1871 [Ruffin v. Commonwealth 62 Va 790,796(1871)] that; "For a time, during his service in the penitentiary, he is in a state of penal servitude to the State. He has, as a consequence of his crime, not only forfeited his liberty, but all his personal rights except those which the law in its humanity accords to him. He is for the time being a slave of the State. He is civiliter mortuus; and his estate, if he has any, is administered like that of a dead man."

As the Thirteenth Amendment's Civil Rights Act was adopted, prisons became the legalized defacto form of slavery. One Hundred & Fifty years later names may have changed for political correctness and ideologies may not be so overt, however, the mentality of today's prisons are quintessentially the same as they were in 1871. Throughout the country many prisons & jails are functioning well under the legal/ethical standards and requirements. The vast majority are overcrowded and undermanned, while the moral is at an all time low. As a result hundreds of millions of dollars are shelled out annually for law suits, settlements and fines at the tax payers expense. These treatments and financial burdens have never adequately been exposed. The ONLY way this will change is by becoming a constituent. Politicians campaign to those who vote and their actions while in office are a reflection. Having the ability to present issues by referendum or in a Town Hall/debate setting will not only open the door for changes in prison, it will also allow the public to see how they've been grossly misinformed.

A contributing factor in the demise of the Urban community is the lack of genuine investment and opportunity. This is in part due to low voter turnout which does not hold politicians accountable. After years of being disenfranchised, misguided and considered less than a man, there is no trust, no confidence and no faith in a system that has failed them. Voting from prison will speak directly to the Urban community, and has a chance to change the existing narrative.

While the Urban communities have experienced a demise, the rural towns across the United States have prospered from an influx of the prisons that have replaced plantations. For too long the Census Bureau's "residence rule" has allowed these rural white communities to benefit from the inflated populations at the expense of the Urban communities prisoners come from. Despite being used for profit, we have never had a voice. Some may interpret this as racial rhetoric, and those that do are part of the problem. We have always been considered lesser than, property, a means to an end and expendable. The ability to vote gives us a voice and makes us relevant because we possess something of value, a vote.

This is the world we live in and just maybe the wary will see the positivity from behind the prison walls. Nobody imagined that the likes of law enforcement, military, politicians and so many other professional walks of life would storm the Capitol in an attempt to circumvent a legitimate election, but it happened. Sadly, a simple vote is far too often marginalized when so many have died trying and the vast majority of the world is disenfranchised.

To Vote or not to Vote, I hope and pray that you will support to Vote!

Sincerely,



Peter Saunders

Dear: To whom it may Concern

8-15-21

I Theophil Encalado, am writing on behalf of Supporting the people in prison The Right To Vote (SB828)

I believe that many individuals incarcerated do want the chance to vote in order to help out the wrongs even mistakes they've made in past, and be a voice. But by disallowing the incarcerated it not only robs us, but the communities we come from. It denies us of our identities and dignity why is this? Are we not still human beings - are we not still alive and breathing - are we not still people who have made wrong decisions and are imperfect - are we not still U.S. Citizens?

The laws have grappled our wrongs and put us away as Incarcerated individuals which is very oppressing and de-vistating to our psyche, what of the new morals and views that have been gathered while being incarcerated

Because I believe everyone of us evolves with time. So I say yes we should be allowed to vote, And how might the right increase public safety?. I personally view all sorts of news coverage ex... (CNN, CBS, NBC, ABC) etc.. And the Candidates the Ward Alderman and Mayor of Chicago make suggestions but wont follow through. And are continually elected

pg4

Are we not still human beings - are we not still alive and breathing - are we not still people who have made wrong decisions and are imperfect - are we not still U.S. Citizens?

**THEOPHIL
ENCALADO**

And that doesn't stop the violence that plagues our city. Much of the news coverage is pertaining to the exact neighborhoods we've come from. It is so disheartening to our society as a whole, so much more needs to be committed to. So we are passionate about these issues needing to be spot-lighted. But being unable to participate to vote is a hinderance to us trying to resolve and change with the times with regard to making a stand for the public and safety of our loved-ones from said communities which society deems a lost cause "effortless/hopeless". So please give us a voice and chance for change, allow the incarcerated to vote. We are the missing link.!

Sincerely Plus Respectively
Submitted

Theophil Encalado

Shel Ell ID# W38271

Stateville P.O. Box 112

Joliet, Illinois 60434

Dated: August 15th 2021.

We are the missing Link.!

Rickey (R.C.) Robinson
K82958
Stateville C.C.
c/o: P.O. Box 112
Joliet, Illinois 60434

July 21, 2021

RICKY (R.C.) ROBINSON

My Testimony

Before now having the right to vote while in prison, I hadn't given it much thought; and even though I have not yet had the opportunity to review Senate Bill 828 I seriously ask myself the following (3) three questions:

Why do "I" believe people in prison should have the right to vote? Well when I think about it I'm reminded that voting has power. In particular, the power to vote for those that will effect change (e.g. "real" Criminal Justice Reform). I wish I had the opportunity to vote in the presidential election that put Trump in office! The opportunity to vote for Senators; Representatives that would support bills

1.

like this one (SB 828) and the EDR Bill (Earned Discretionary Reentry SB8233/HB2399).

How will restoring the right to vote for people in prison increase public safety? When we think about people like myself, Joe Dole and others in support of the Parole Illinois Initiative (activists if you will), we are those who are not bogged down with the fast paced life on the outside. Thus, we have spent years and even decades sitting still and becoming educated. We have learned that all is not lost, and that we don't have to resort to criminality or violence to overcome our poverty and repressive conditions. Which puts us in the position to walk the walk and educate/enlighten others on just how powerful a tool it is to use our voting power to bring forth Change.

Why else am I passionate about this issue? Well, because it would give me great pleasure to be able to confer with fellow incarcerated individuals and those on the outside, in solidarity with informed minds, come in droves to legitimately flood the legislators/prospective legislators to get Illinois in the shape of - "For The People, By The People!"

Rickey (R.C.) Robinson

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MARCOS RAMIREZ

From: Marcos Ramirez #R66644

P.O. Box 112

Joliet, IL 60434

Re: Submission of Testimony in Support of (SB828) Right to Vote Bill

Hi! My name is Marcos Ramirez. I'm 43 yrs. old; born & raised in the Chicago - Wicker Park & Humboldt Park communities, and I have been incarcerated for over 20 yrs. now. As a father of two young-adult sons and an uncle of many nieces & nephews in my family, I do believe people in prison should have the right to vote. I grew up in a household where my mother used to take me with her to the ballot box located in our neighborhood park district field house during every election, and I learned early on that voting was an important civic duty that we as American citizens needed to fulfill. The reason I believe people in prison should have the right to vote is because people in prison still have family members living in our outside communities where we used to live before our incarceration who are being affected by the decisions being made by our elected government officials who are on a local, state, and national level, and people in prison are still being counted in the Census with the populations of the communities in which our prison facilities (where we're being held at) are located.

So, if our bodies are valuable to the government and to society for a "population count" that will determine how much federal funding is to be allocated to each respective town, district, or county so that their communities can receive resources which our families

If our bodies are valuable

In our democracy, then so should our minds and hearts be legislatively and socially recognized and treated as equally valuable to our democracy.

[2 of 6]

(who live in the communities we originally come from) should rightfully be receiving, then our votes should also be considered valuable to the government and to the citizens. Our votes should be considered valuable for our moral and intellectual participation in a democratic process which will also eventually be affecting not only our families and communities, but which will also be affecting people in prison who will eventually be getting released from prison, and returning back to our families and communities. If our bodies are valuable in our democracy, then so should our minds and hearts be legislatively and socially recognized and treated as equally valuable to our democracy. People in prison possess a vast array of good basic moral values and ethical sensitivities geared toward cultivating and preserving our common human interests of practicing equity, safety, and well being for all people in our inside and outside communities.

We have been stripped naked of so many basic common freedoms and for so many years that we've had ample opportunity to sit and reflect on what's most important and valuable to us in life, and usually what emerges in our minds from the purifying fire of our suffering (and with crystal clarity) is the pure gold revelation that it is our families, our health, our communities, and our freedoms as American citizens which are most valuable and important to us in our lives. People in prison are not empty shells with no souls. We are moral, ethical, and socially responsible bodies with educated minds who are keen to the socio-economic, infrastructural, and

social justice-oriented issues and needs for change in our country. Our right to participate in contributing to improving the systemic, social, economic functioning of our Nation should be restored.

Restoring the right to vote for people in prison will most certainly increase public safety because it will intentionally and pro-actively invite us to co-participate with people in society in our mutual civic duty to be socially responsible citizens who partake in the exercising of our democratic freedoms. Furthermore, restoring our right to vote will also work effectively to restore our sense of humanity and basic human dignity in a system of mass incarceration which has by its very design worked to oppress and dehumanize people of color for decades (and even centuries) through its historically racist, systemic, and social practices of disenfranchisement, civil death, and banishment. These practices have completely incapacitated, demonized, and excluded us from existing and being treated as equally whole human beings with our fellow citizens on the outside. Restoring our right to vote while in prison would serve as an act of reparations to begin the process of making amends for the historical harms imposed on people of color by systemic racism, mass incarceration, and the prison-industrial-complex.

If society acts in the interests of restorative justice (rather than retributive justice) as many of the components of our Illinois Criminal Justice System have already begun to do

through recent legislative reforms, and people in prison begin to increasingly be treated as decent human beings by restoring our rights to vote, educating & rehabilitating us through faith-based, college-credited courses, evidence-based, and vocational-job training programs, we will re-enter society as transformed human beings who will be ready to hit the ground running in continuing to engage in fulfilling our civic duties with our fellow citizens in our outside communities.

I'm very passionate about this issue because, as a Peer Educator for the IL Dept. of Health who teaches on HIV/AIDS, & STDs awareness & prevention (as well as TRAC-1 Parole School for individuals in custody who are about to M.S.R. out), I also teach returning citizens about their voting rights via the I.D.O.C.'s Civics Education Program, and I wholeheartedly believe in equipping & empowering people in prison with the knowledge we need in order to not only successfully reintegrate but to also thrive and contribute to improving social and systemic conditions in society. Since day one of my 20 year incarceration, thus far, I've sought diligently to improve myself through my faith in God as a Christian, through community service via mentoring, counseling, and conflict resolution practices at the CCT/Division 10 and in prison, through educational & evidence-based programming, and through initiating legislative reform, social justice advocacy, and restorative justice practices in my prison and neighborhood contexts. I became a certified law clerk and worked at the law library at Menard CC. for 5 1/2 yrs. doing legal research, police misconduct advocacy,

(5 of 6)

and criminal justice & sentencing reform advocacy work. Here at Stateville, I started coordinating collaborative charity projects with my fellow residents in prison and outside organizations (like The Alzheimer's Association & Guardian Angel), as well as with local University students, Professors, and Churches to make amends and give back to people in society who've been harmed by poverty, poor quality education, disease, domestic violence, and homelessness. This is how I founded my Inside Initiative on Restorative Justice Project in prison, and I plan to turn it into a non-profit after i'm released in a concerted effort to continue my vocational work and life calling to do social justice advocacy and activism on both sides of the prison walls. I'm also a certified Writing Advisor for the NPU/Stateville Writing Center assisting student writers with their course work writing and ESL/Spanish writers with understanding their syllabus. As a fourth-year Master's Degree student in Restorative Justice Ministry at North Park Theological Seminary's School of Restorative Arts, I am scheduled to graduate in May 2023, and I plan to use my educational training as a servant-leader to reach out to the youth in marginalized neighborhoods through mentoring, counseling, and educating them about systemic injustice and how these structural & social factors affect their lives in the community. I want to steer them away from gangs, drugs, and guns on the streets as a strategy to help shut down the school-to-prison pipeline, and turn teenagers & young adults back to school through health education, career path vocational/job training workshops, violence prevention education & practices, legislative reform advocacy training,

(6 of 6)

and civics education workshops. As a certified writing advisor, i'd like to help kids improve their writing skills for effective communication, preparing resumes, doing class assignments, etc.

If I can teach ~~our~~ youth the importance of voting and engaging in their civic duties, I believe I can help prevent them from making bad decisions that could lead them to prison. I'm passionate about giving people in prison the right to vote because doing so will ultimately transform the prison culture into a training ground for more future Peer Educators, Mentors, Social Justice Advocates, Lobbyists, and Community Leaders/Organizers (like myself) to come out of prison and re-enter society to help interrupt cycles of violence, to help change the social narrative of poor people of color, and to help transform our communities and society as a whole!

Please support Chicago Votes in their efforts to give people in prison the right to vote. Support (SB828)!

Thank you for reading my testimony!

Sincerely,

Marcos Ramirez

¹ www.northpark.edu/seminary/schoolofrestorativearts
² <https://www.northpark.edu/facademics/undergraduate-programs/academic-assistance/writing-center>

* See: ¹ [Change.org/Justice for Marcos Ramirez](https://change.org/Justice-for-Marcos-Ramirez)
² [Change.org/Positive for Covid-19 Emergency Clemency Petition - "I don't want to die in prison."](https://change.org/Positive-for-Covid-19-Emergency-Clemency-Petition-I-dont-want-to-die-in-prison/)
³ [Instagram @Justice4MarcosRamirez](https://www.instagram.com/Justice4MarcosRamirez)
⁴ [Facebook @ Ramirez Marcos](https://www.facebook.com/RamirezMarcos)
⁵ Email @ 777Ramirez.Marcos@gmail.com

Why do I believe people in prison should have the right to vote?

Oftentimes (especially depending on what type of environment we grew up in) we make mistakes when we are young. Some mistakes go unnoticed, while others can land you in jail, which could ultimately culminate in someone going in a direction that could land them in prison.

It is a scientific fact that the older we get the more responsible we become. Because our brains continue to develop. This also applies to those of us who are in prison.

As we mature and make better decisions we obtain a better understanding of life in general and the responsibilities associated with being an adult. Paramount to those responsibilities is taking better care of ourselves and our families. Having the ability to vote while in prison will give those of us an opportunity to exercise our civic duties and help hopefully change things for the better for our families and our communities.

#R20112
By: David Wales
Stateville C.C.

DAVID WALEES

Most of us are extensions of our families. And will someday return to society. Some of us to the same communities. Being able to vote allows us to help change the very circumstances that filtered most of us through this system. A lot of us have children we don't want going through the very thing we are going through. Being able to vote would help us also strive towards being responsible parents. Not just responsible citizens.

Also - and this is very important - as we speak there are forces out there who are attempting to manipulate people's right to vote and passing laws that make it harder for people to vote. This right here should inform us how important our voting rights are. One could even argue that the mass incarceration movement was part of hindering our voting rights. Because in some states, not only can you not vote while you are in prison, but once you are convicted your voting rights are never restored. You are now labeled a convicted felon.

Being able to vote while in prison could actually affect some of these draconian

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Sincerely,
DAVID WALES
R20112
P.O. Box 112
Stateville C.I.
Joliet, IL 60434

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Being able to vote while in prison could actually affect some of these draconian

Most of us are extensions of our families, and will someday return to society. Some of us to the same communities. Being able to vote allows us to help change the very circumstances that filtered most of us through this system. A lot

laws that are being implemented to hold people back.

In closing - people in prison should have the right to vote because it is our civic duty to impart change and be responsible for changing the very places some of us helped to destroy.

And even if we are here in prison we still have friends, family, and kids we want to be safe and have the best opportunities in life to be the most productive citizens every single American ~~we~~ ^{should} have. Not just certain Americans, they should not have to suffer for the mistakes of someone else. Let us vote!

DARRION EVANS

The reason why I feel that people should be able to vote is the simple fact that we are still American citizens. I deeply also feel like we are being excluded from voting based off one mistake. Then adding on top of that once released we have to wait a certain amount of years which is unfair. As U.S. citizens we are unable to vote if in prison and once released to society have to wait to vote but then again like I stated before we are U.S. citizens that have to abide by laws set forth by congress and presidents but can't vote. We should be able to vote in prison and shouldn't have to wait once released. As long as we are U.S. citizens and have to abide by laws and be held accountable for any irrational actions we do, we should be able to vote. It shouldn't exclude individuals from doing such just off one mistake.

Restoring the right to vote in prison will increase public safety because alot of peoples mind changes over time. So they value things they didn't before. They want the best for the community. They find ways to help the public. Most of people incarcerated come from low income communities and violent communities so where it traumatizes them and they demand change to break the continuous cycle. Not only for themselves but for the future and for everyone else affected. For instance, I, Darion Evans, am destined to break a cycle. I grew up without a positive father figure to show me right from wrong. So growing up I thought wrong was right and right was wrong because I had no one there to teach me values of things.

Growing up having 2 kids but still trying to find myself and understand everything

resulted in my incarceration at the age of 15 years of age and was sentenced to 45 years. Now over time now 22 years of age I find ways I can help the world improve it's safety. Whether that be me having conversations with individuals that are about to re-enter society or come up with plans myself. Once I get released whenever the time comes I plan on holding non profit programs and doing restorative justice for my community

trying to lower the crime rate in the city. So yes, restoring the right to vote for prisoners will help public safety cause we are living proof that rehabilitation can happen and become law abiding citizens.

I'm so passionate about this issue because my cellmate Micheal Jimmens currently in stateville with me helped me further understand that the world needs change and we can help do that by simply teaching back to communities that alot of people come from and do things that can help better that environment. Teaching back to younger individuals and show them different ways to live than what we call the "streets". Giving them a real opportunity to live and grow up to be successful and break the cycle that keeps continuing. As we found out over time we have to lead by example to show the people change can happen no matter the situation. We are living proof that we need is the chance

Two years ago, I and several incarcerated residents were able to meet with Lieutenant Governor Stratton, her JEO Initiative team, and seven state legislators to discuss a possible solution to Illinois' overcrowded prisons. We infused our personal stories and how this state's harsh sentencing policies affect our right to be useful citizens with a proposal for an Earned Discretionary Release. As always, our stories and ideas were totally disregarded when legislators decided to roll out a major package of criminal justice reform in the beginning of 2021.

Testimony
For Voting Rights
By: Alex Negrón

The passing of this bill allows state legislators the ability to pad their record stats under justice reform without actually displaying any justice for the people who have been harmed by the justice system for the past thirty years if not more. That's because politicians believe they have all the answers to their constituents' issues without consulting them. I believe that incarcerated citizens should have the right to vote because they deserve the right to be heard and it holds public servants accountable in their policy-making process to be more inclusive.

Don't get me wrong, life in prison has dramatically gotten better in a lot of aspects; especially within the last five years. ~~But it has also gotten worse~~ we have greater access to education and to stay in contact with our loved ones. But it has also gotten worse

in so many other aspects as well. The living conditions for instance, I live in a condemned building. The bricks that hold this building together are eroding, the foundation is compromised and it's clothed in black mold. The water source shows signs of contamination and the funding for food and clothing is almost ~~non-existent~~ non-existent. This leaves the most indigent prisoner vulnerable and barely surviving the pangs of their incarceration.

The right for incarcerated citizens to vote is a start to giving them their basic human rights. Having the right to vote in America means that your opinion and your perspective on how this nation should run matters on a state, local, and federal level. For decades, the opinions of the incarcerated have not mattered and it has paved the way for incarcerated persons to be further harmed and marginalized.

Every citizen of this nation has the right to be heard. If prisoners are allowed the right to vote, that allows the unheard of our society to finally have a voice in an

ALEX NEGRON

arena that has explicitly disregarded them. Being silent or silenced about the issues that plague our community perpetuates dehumanization and poverty within. It is when the voices are heard from the marginalized, and only then, ~~can~~ can transformation take place. Allowing prisoners the right to vote puts us, as ~~real~~ citizens, on the right path to a long and ~~arduous~~ ~~and~~ hard journey.

Another reason why I believe that prisoners should be allowed the right to vote is because, for far too long, legislators have not been held accountable for the policies they pass and enact. Their solutions to our society's problems have caused the issues to worsen in their watch. Instead of addressing them to secure a better future, they have consistently tried to answer ~~those~~ those issues by means of leaving it for the next generation to fix it.

Politicians main concern is aligning their interests and agendas with large corporations that keep them in office. The scandal with ComEd is one of probably hundreds of examples. The more voters that are poor, disenfranchised, and most vulnerable, are able to participate in our civic duty to vote, the more our legislators will be held accountable to their constituents. It will cause legislators to meet the needs of our ailing communities both inside and out.

Not being able to vote has been a topic that has hindered this nation from being the beacon of light it heralds itself to be. Voter suppression and restriction breeds divisiveness and exclusivity. ~~At~~ At a time when unity and inclusivity is so much needed in our nation, the right vote for incarcerated citizens will be a small step for that goal to be accomplished.

Parole Illinois

7-28-21

I start this letter with so much respect and appreciation. The fight that you guys are exhibiting for the prison population to say the least is honorable.

My name is Charles Hill, on May 12, 2021

I became a published poet. I am sending my book with this letter, it touches on a lot of the issues we are fighting for. I am a juvenile offender who is most definitely a part of this struggle with you for us. If you like my book please share it with others. I would like to assist you in all endeavors, ~~the~~ especially the ones geared towards giving people like me a second chance. I have tried to connect to you on facebook but by me being incarcerated and having someone else running my page it is hard. Parole issues, Voting issues, or issues of any kind that are dealing with viewing the incarcerated individual as a human is important, so thank you.

essay on Voting rights

Being a part of the prison population since 2006 has opened my eyes to many things that I was blind to beforehand. One thing is that the Miranda Rights are not the only rights that I am entitled to as an American citizen. Although they have stripped me of many of my Constitutional rights as a convicted prisoner or should I say "state property", ~~some~~ some of those rights are still available to me since I am still an American citizen. I believe that the right to vote should be one of the rights still available to me.

CHARLES HILL

According to the constitution the purpose of the prison system is to restore each incarcerated individual back to a useful citizen. Which means that everything that is going on in the free world and affects the free world will also affect an incarcerated individual upon is release. Having some say of who is in power could play a huge role in his usefulness to society. As an incarcerated man doing my best to grow ~~up~~ in knowledge and wisdom I have found that although this is not the best environment to attain those characteristics in, it is one that a strong American citizen can attain these characteristics. Allowing American citizens like me to vote for the people who are making the laws and enforcing laws is only fair, seeing that it affects me and the people close or connected to me in a ~~big~~ huge way. People in prison are not the smartest people in the ^{world} but they are definitely not the dumbest either. We see the world from a perspective that the majority does not which allows us to see issues in a different light. Which is what you need when you are giving people so much power over the population of a state, county or the country. The more diverse the pool of voters is, the higher chances of the right people being in office. Especially with the mass majority of the incarcerated population being African American or Latino.

essay of voting rights.

African Americans along with the rest of the oppressed citizens have fought for this right to vote and they have earned this right to vote. Taking it ~~off~~ from a citizen is to violate his or her rights. When a person becomes incarcerated they are still a human being. One mistake doesn't take away from that fact. If a person is doing what is needed to restore themselves to useful citizenship; they should be treated as such in every aspect. That is the whole purpose of liberty, justice and equality. Which is what is preached by just about every person that is running for some type of office.

Sincerely,

Charles Hill

Charles Hill #R558880

P.S. My Book is available
on Amazon.com.

8/3/21

① TESTIMONY - THE SUPPORT EFFORTS IN
GIVING PRISONERS THE RIGHT TO VOTE.

(SB 928), By PRISONERS OF STATEVILLE CORR. CENTER
MR. DIMITROUS THOMAS #183211

ESSAY - BELOW

Hello my name is Dimitrous Thomas and I
am currently incarcerated in Stateville Corr.
Center and I believe myself & others
who are apart of this prison population
should have the right to vote because we
are still American citizens whom were born
in the United States of America. Unfortunately
we are incarcerated or convicted of a crime
but we still have important views, opinions,
and good solutions of choices in our votes if
granted our rights to vote. By contributing
our votes in the elections for selecting
a leader or better candidate to lead with
the best direction for the peoples, which
surely not excluding prisoners who are
apart of this country. Prisoners have valid
views and prisoners seek rehabilitation in
making progress to become better individuals
although these prisons institutions suppose to
practice, restore, and rehabilitate the prisoners
so they can become better useful ~~citizens~~
men & women in society, but this practice

②

is further from its truth on books or
paper (LAW). I do understand this is
only one problem of many, but we are
human beings that are being neglected
or step by our individual rights to vote
like any other American of this country.
This problem should be (changed) or resolved
by allowing prisoners and every American voting
rights that so many American peoples have
sacrificed their lives freedom for everyone
could have a choice to vote in this country.
Prisoners can definitely be a tool in helping
change the world by involving prisoners who
are apart of the United States in giving
them a right to vote. Also prisoners can
surely be helpful in increasing public safety
by feeling included in the problems of this
country and participating in having their
votes being heard or matter in making
their environment, country, states, city, or
so many other areas in this country
to be a better everywhere also for public safety,
for our peoples. So many prisoners are incarcerated,
and convicted on crimes they later are exonerated
on by this corrupted judicial system. Prisoners
usually find better developments in themselves
and their early on behavior in which landed them
behind bars. Prisoners, speaking for the must
find positive outlets and solutions to seek change
in their behavior to make better growth as a person.

DIMITROUS
THOMAS

(3)

THIS Point Im Trying To MAKE IS EVERYONE CHANCES FOR THE BETTER OF THEMSELVES AT SOME POINT OR FOR THE WORSEN OF THEMSELVES, THATS WHY ITS A CHOICE IN THE PERSON TO SEEK ODDELY WAYS OR CHOOSE TO WALK WITH THE DEVIL AND NOT BECOME A BETTER INDIVIDUAL OR THEY ARE SERIOUSLY MENTALLY ILL, BY CONTINUING TO MAKE THIS COUNTRY WORSEN OF HURTING OTHERS BY INDIVIDUALS ACTIONS. I AM PASSIONATE ABOUT SUPPORTING PRISONERS RIGHTS TO VOTE, BECAUSE I WOULD LIKE CHANGE IN HELPING MYSELF & OTHERS TO MAKE THIS COUNTRY A BETTER PLACE, BY POTENTIALLY HELPING TO REFORM CRIMINAL JUDICIAL SYSTEMS, ALSO BEING A TOOL TO HELP PLACE THE RIGHT PEOPLES IN POSITION TO CREATE THE CHANGE THATS NEEDED IN THIS COUNTRY. I WOULD LIKE TO PROVIDE MORE IDEAS, OR VIEWS TO WHY ITS IMPORTANT FOR PRISONERS SHOULD HAVE THE RIGHT TO VOTE SO MY PASSION ABOUT THIS RIGHT WILL NOT REST HERE TODAY, SO LOOK MORE FROM HEARING FROM ME IN THIS PROBLEM WE CONTINUE TO FACE.

I AM PASSIONATE ABOUT SUPPORTING PRISONERS RIGHTS TO VOTE, BECAUSE I WOULD LIKE CHANGE IN HELPING MYSELF & OTHERS TO MAKE THIS COUNTRY A BETTER PLACE, BY POTENTIALLY HELPING TO REFORM CRIMINAL JUDICIAL SYSTEMS, ALSO BEING A TOOL TO HELP PLACE THE RIGHT PEOPLES IN POSITION TO CREATE THE CHANGE THATS NEEDED IN THIS COUNTRY. I WOULD LIKE TO

SUPPORT PRISONERS RIGHT TO
VOTE.

SUPPORT PRISONERS RIGHT TO
VOTE.

DONJUAN "BENNY" RIOS

My name is Benny Rios DonJuan and I've been incarcerated for nearly two decades. Currently, I am in my final year of earning a Master's Degree in Christian Ministry and Restorative Arts through North Park University and Theological Seminary. I'm writing this letter in strong support for SB 828, which would allow for prisoners to vote while in prison.

For too long prisoners have been dehumanized and disenfranchised, especially with regards to the voting process. By allowing prisoners to vote it would no longer deny them of their right to human dignity and it would ensure that they and their communities would be properly represented. Without the right to vote while incarcerated, they remain a commodity and are exploited by the communities that have

prisons in them. These communities that have prisons in them benefit from all of the bodies within those prisons, while prisoners are excluded from the aid provided to the communities that they reside in. The State of Illinois understands the importance of allowing the formerly incarcerated to vote immediately after their release from prison as evidenced by the Re-Entering Citizens Civic Education Act that was enacted in 2020. It's time to take it a step further and allow for incarcerated prisoners to vote so that every person in Illinois could be properly represented.

By allowing prisoners to vote it would make them feel connected to society as they practice their civic duties. It would also increase public safety because it allows for prisoners to think more about what is needed in their communities so that they could vote for the candidate that would fight for bringing the necessary resources

into their communities. Many people are incarcerated because we have been misrepresented by the leaders in our communities and the State. Prisoners know what is needed in order to prevent incarceration and violence and their knowledge would help in making the critical votes to that would lead to public safety.

Thank You, DonJuan "Benny" Rios

DONJUAN RIOS #R216343
P.O. BOX 112
JOLIET, IL 60434

July 25, 2021

KIRK

HORSHAW

7-26-2021

Rep. Lashawn Ford, (or whom it may concern)

How you doing? Good I

hope. Me, I'm doing well do to my circumstances.

Sorry to bother you but I do believe prisoners should be allowed to vote. Like a guy like myself, I been incarcerated 17 years. First case ever!

My projected outdate is 2069. Saying this to

say the neighborhoods I grew up in (Englewood, South Shore), wasn't any "boys and girls club", after

school programs. So kids start seeing alot of

things at certain ages they was not suppose to be seeing. Instead of positive actives and

having descent meals to eat. That's why I

believe prisoners should be able to vote so kids

and our kids in these communities and through out

Chicago and Illinois wouldn't or should have to

experience a bad upbringing. Having to adopt to

gangs and other wrongful things, for us to help put

somebody in control with a good plan to really benefit

our communities with "boys and girls club", after school programs,

control the violence, and keep our families safe. Thank for

Your time. Take care and stay safe. Sincerely,

Kirk Horshaw

M21693

Call for Testimony (SB 828)

1.) Why do you believe people in prison should have the right to vote?

Because no one should have their rights taken away for mistakes they make, if you start taking people in prison rights away to vote, what's next? our rights to be treated as a human, they already take away our rights to bare arms (2nd Amendment) we have no voice in prison (1st Amendment) being in prison shouldn't allow the people in power to treat prisoners

as less than human, A large part of the population in prison are actually innocent, there are so many voices that need to be heard, the only way to really be heard is through our votes, if that is the only way we're heard and it's taken away, then we have nothing. Having your right to vote taken away is just another form of the slave masters' mentality, another form of control so that the many black and brown men and women in prison don't have a say about what politicians are in office, judges, senators, etc.

our votes, even in prison, could define and shape the way we're treated in courts, jails, prisons and in society, there should never be any crime committed that should take away your right to unless you truly denounce your citizenship, we are not defined by our crimes that we're accused of, there has to be a reason why the powers that be don't want prisoners to have the right to vote, one reason is that prisons are filled with black and brown people, another reason is that every vote is so important that it scares the powers that be so much that they truly believe that their lives would be meaningless without controlling other people (lives and rights). We as prisoners are financially learning the power of each and every vote, and there are thousands of prisoners that want to vote and have their voices heard and they should be heard, if they have no hidden agenda, let us have our vote.

**MICHAEL
MYERS**

2.) How will restoring the right to vote for people in prisons increase public safety?

First of all, the people in charge don't have a clue about what's really going on in the public (society). Many of them are set in their ways and shouldn't even be in power, our votes would be for the people who are in touch with the needs of people on both side of the wall, we as prisoners are more in tune with what's going on in society and what should be done to ensure public safety, restoring our voting rights would allow us to put someone in power that would give an ear to the voices that know what's going on and who really care, the restoration of our right to vote shouldn't even be an issue, we should never be under any authority that has the power to strip us of that right, taking away our right to vote is not a threat to society, so what's the true underline reason for not wanting us to vote, those are our children that are out there lost, those are our neighborhoods that are being ravaged by our lost children, who know our children better than the fathers and mothers that are incarcerated.

if you people in power are making a profit off of our incarceration at least we should have a right to vote so we can put someone in power of authority that will at least consider the value of our vote as it relates to public safety, will restoration of our voting rights be a threat to public safety? NO! because the right

People in play could actually save lives and ensure the public safety and society as a whole, there have been many mistakes made with taking away a prisoners rights to vote, one is: after being exonerated after many years of incarceration and seeing all the bad stuff that's going on in society and losing the right to vote, your vote could have made a difference in the way increasing public safety, taking away our right to vote hasn't worked so far, this is why I feel like the restoration of prisoners rights to vote would help increase public safety, because it would make any person running for office aware that they would have to do the right thing or face the fact that they could be voted out of office if they didn't truly have public safety as the main concern of their office.

3.) Why are you so passionate about this issue?

Because, so many freedoms have been taken away from me, one of the most detrimental one was my right to vote, somehow it de-humanizes you, it's hard having your freedom taken away, then to have your rights taken away as well is even harder, some liberties should not be an option to be taken away, my passion about this issue runs deep about many of the issues related to incarcerated people, or should I say individuals in custody, that narrative is a good start, not calling us inmates or criminals, but individuals in custody, anyway, it seems to be some progress being made, hopefully our rights to vote will be restored at some point, in the mean time we should all focus on freedom and the liberties of freedom, like voting and all the other liberties of that aspect. Thank you
Michael Myers

Prison Voting Rights

By Scott Parker, R-12797

With over 2 million men and women serving time in State and Federal prisons and jails in this country, most of them, aside from their current circumstances eligible to vote but are not allowed is archaic. In the society we see today voting has never been more important to every person who is eligible, incarcerated or not. Every issue that affects those living "normal" lives will at some point effect their loved ones who may be incarcerated whether it be financially, educationally, or politically in ways of prison funding or reforms. But just as we see on T.V. just about every day now this issue has turned into another partisan battle that is just another

form of voter restrictions being placed upon the mostly Black and Brown inmates who make up the greater majority of incarcerated in this country. Of course there are those who will make the claim that inmates can't be allowed to vote because we don't know the issues, or we can't "study" a candidate enough to choose. The biggest reason I always hear is that if allowed to vote inmates would vote more Democratic than Republican and 2 million more votes is a daunting number if that was true which of course it's not.

Truth is the great majority of the incarcerated population would not even vote if they were out in society. Just for the record, I am a 58 year old white educated male who served my country in the U.S. Army Reserve. I did vote before my incarceration and every election I now miss makes me distraught that I can't support candidates who have our country's welfare first, not the ridiculousness and racist rantings we've seen over the last few years.

SCOTT PARKER

What better place to educate these mostly young (18-30) men and women of mostly urban minority ethnicity that make up much of the incarcerated population, whose elected officials set the policies

that affect our everyday lives.

As one of those individuals who has no say in electing those who are responsible for my well-being is a huge miscarriage of justice that is only overshadowed by "truth-in-sentencing" laws that are still being used in states like Illinois, neither should be allowed to continue!

As we have now seen there are a number of safe, legal, and responsible ways to cast ballots in this country and to extend those efforts to incarcerated individuals should be on every official running for office agenda, or we find ones who will. This would force candidates to address prison reform, ^{unsafe} conditions, overcrowding, etc. It would also show the younger and younger prison population that they have a responsibility whether inside or outside to have active participation in who is making the laws that oversee their lives.

There is nothing worse than someone who constantly complains about their elected officials, but then says "I don't vote!" except for those who can't vote but want to.

Scott Parker

R-12797

Stateville C.C.

Steven Martin B88157 Stateville Correctional center

The fact that an incarcerated individual is not allowed to vote is unconstitutional. These people represent a large part of our population that needs representation. Voting affords a individual a positive role in the politics that form the world they live in. Being considered a second class citizen by your own state is detrimental to the whole of society.

Article 1, Sec. 11, of the Illinois constitution states as follows: "All penalties shall be determined both according to the seriousness of the offense and with the objective of restoring the offender to useful citizenship. This statement is completely overlooked when the conversation of voting rights for offenders is being had. If the goal is to return to useful citizenship then the right to vote is required. It can be a meaningful step to do something positive. Those we choose to represent us at the state and federal levels effect the daily lives of every citizen.

Every population deserves representation in the political realm. The best person to choose who is to represent a population, is those who live in them. The prison population is being strongly under represented. This has created problems unforeseen by government do

to lack of credible information. The needs of this population need to be expressed by someone informed. Do to no voting rights this has been totally non existant.

The right to vote will also afford someone with a worthless feeling an opportunity to do good work. A human without purpose can lose themselves faster than any other creature. We all want to feel like we are needed, and that we are contributing.

This bill could be just the thing to bring more incarcerated people to positive work.

The fact that our government doesn't seek my opinion on who represents my need, makes me feel second class. A second class citizen does not feel the need to fight for representation. This compounds the problem creating the need for even more information to be conveyed. This will open lines of communication that have not been there before.

before.

This is my reasoning behind writing this, I hope you agree, but the fact that you have ask me my opinion shows this is going in a positive direction. I hope this helps or at least keeps the conversation alive.

Steven Martin

STEVE MARTIN

TAKEAWAYS:

Most of us are extensions of our families. And will someday return to society. Some of us to the same communities. Being able to vote allows us to help change the very circumstances that filtered most of us through this system. A lot

If our bodies are valuable

in our democracy, then so should our minds and hearts be legislatively and socially recognized and treated as equally valuable to our democracy.

There is nothing worse than someone who constantly complains about their elected officials, but then says "I don't vote!" except for those who can't vote but want to.

Please support Chicago Votes in their efforts to give people in prison the right to vote. Support (SB828)!

We are the missing Link.!

Support Prisoners Fight to
Vote.

ADVOCACY FOR #SB828

- **CALL YOUR LAWMAKERS**

- CALL SCRIPT: *HELLO REPRESENTATIVE/SENATOR_____ MY NAME IS _____ AND I AM REACHING OUT AS AN ILLINOIS RESIDENT WITH CHICAGO VOTES TO ASK THAT YOU VOTE "YES" ON SENATE BILL 828 WHICH WOULD RESTORE VOTING RIGHTS TO PEOPLE CURRENTLY IN PRISON. THERE ARE OVER 30,000 PEOPLE INCARCERATED IN ILLINOIS PRISONS EVERY YEAR AND THEIR LIVES ARE IMPACTED BY DECISIONS MADE BY ELECTED OFFICIALS. OUR DEMOCRACY WORKS BETTER WHEN MORE PEOPLE ARE INVOLVED AND HAVING STRONG TIES TO THE COMMUNITY THROUGH CIVIC ENGAGEMENT REDUCES RECIDIVISM AND MAKES US ALL SAFER. PLEASE SUPPORT SENATE BILL 828.*

- **POST ABOUT SB828 ON SOCIAL MEDIA**

- EXAMPLE TWEET: *IN 2019, SB2090 WAS SUCCESSFULLY PASSED, ENSURING ELIGIBLE VOTERS IN JAIL HAVE ACCESS TO THE BALLOT. NOW IL IS GOING EVEN FURTHER, PUSHING TO RESTORE THE RIGHT TO VOTE TO PEOPLE IN PRISON. HELP US ENFRANCHISE OVER 30,000 PEOPLE WITH #SB828 [BIT.LY/SUPPORTSB828](https://bit.ly/supportsb828)*

- **SHARE AND TALK ABOUT THE BILL WITH FRIENDS, FAMILIES AND EVERYBODY YOU KNOW**

#SB828 #UNLOCKCIVICS @CHICAGOVOTES

Alex Boutros, Community Organizing Manager: Alex@chicagovotes.com, 248.520.2481
Frederique Desrosiers, Policy Associate, Freddie@chicagovotes.com, 618-713-4241



OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

- What impact does letter-writing carry for you?
- What does reimagining democracy look like for you?
- Why do you believe people in prison should have the right to vote?
- What does public safety look like to you?
- How will restoring the rights to vote for people in prison increase public safety?
- What does supporting #SB828 mean to you?