

**Testimony of Marcia Johnson-Blanco of the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law on the Value My Vote Act before the Ways & Means Committee of the Maryland House of Delegates**

**January 19, 2021**

Chairwoman Kaiser, Vice-Chair Washington, and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony regarding the Value My Vote Act. My name is Marcia Johnson-Blanco and I co-direct the Voting Rights Project of the Lawyers' Committee of Civil Rights Under Law, a national, non-partisan civil rights non-profit founded after President John F. Kennedy urged the private bar to join the fight for civil rights and dedicated to securing equal justice under law. I am also a Maryland Resident.

I strongly support passage of the Value My Vote Act by this Committee and the Maryland General Assembly. This legislation addresses a glaring need. Individuals in jail are often *de facto* disenfranchised by state and local officials because they are prevented from accessing registration or absentee ballot materials, or provided misinformation about their eligibility to vote while in jail.

This legislation would help ensure that the state of Maryland exercises its constitutional duty. Individuals incarcerated in jails in Maryland are often eligible to vote and are denied the right to have their voices heard in the electoral process. Those individuals may be awaiting trial, or serving time for a misdemeanor. The Value My Vote Act ensures that these citizens can make their voice heard in the democratic process.

By passing the Value My Vote Act, Maryland would join a growing list of jurisdictions that are taking steps to address the *de facto* disenfranchisement of eligible voters in jail. These jurisdictions,

including Chicago, Denver, Houston, Los Angeles, and Philadelphia and the District of Columbia, have taken affirmative steps to ensure voters have the means they need to register and cast ballots. Additionally, several states have adopted reforms like those proposed in the Value My Vote Act. In Colorado, for example, the Secretary of State requires county clerks to submit a plan developed with county sheriffs on how eligible incarcerated persons will be able to register and vote from jail. Other states, like Illinois and California have enacted provisions which require state and local officials to provide information about registering to vote to individuals upon release from incarceration.

The Maryland General Assembly should pass the Value My Vote Act and join the movement to protect the voting rights of incarcerated individuals.