



DATE: February 27, 2019  
TO: Government Administration and Elections Committee  
FROM: Julia Wilcox, Manager of Advocacy & Public Policy  
RE: **S.B. 53** AN ACT CONCERNING ELECTORAL PRIVILEGES FOR INCARCERATED INDIVIDUALS  
**H.B. 7213** AN ACT CONCERNING ELECTORAL PRIVILEGES OF CERTAIN PAROLEES AND CHALLENGERS IN THE POLLING PLACE

Good afternoon Senator Flexer, Representative Fox, Senator Sampson, Representative France and distinguished members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee:

My name is Julia Wilcox, Manager of Advocacy & Public Policy, at the CT Community Nonprofit Alliance (The Alliance). The Alliance is the statewide advocacy organization representing nonprofits, with a membership of more than 300 community organizations and associations. Nonprofits deliver essential services to more than half a million people each year and employ almost 14% of Connecticut's workforce.

I appreciate the opportunity to submit testimony **in support** of S.B. 53 An Act Restoring Electoral Privileges to Felony Convicts Who Are on Parole, and in support of Sections 1-5 of H.B. 7213: An Act Concerning Electoral Privileges of Certain Parolees and Challengers in Polling Places.

Community nonprofits in Connecticut work to reintegrate former offenders into their communities. As of December 2018, there were 3,935 citizens of our state who were receiving community supervision from nonprofit providers who contract with the DOC. This represents an 18% increase since December 2015, while the prison population was simultaneously reduced by 16%. Thousands more receive services through providers who contract with CSSD and the Judicial Branch.

#### **S.B. 53: An Act Restoring Electoral Privileges to Felony Convicts Who Are on Parole**

S.B. 53 provides for restoration of electoral privileges to incarcerated individuals and retention of such privileges by individuals who may be incarcerated in the future. Section 1(e) proposes that Section 9-46a of the general statutes would be repealed, to reflect that a person who has been convicted of a felony and committed to confinement in a federal or other state correctional institution or facility or community residence "shall have such person's electoral privileges restored."

#### **H.B. 7213: An Act Concerning Electoral Privileges of Certain Parolees and Challengers in Polling Places**

H.B. 7213 repeals Section 9-46a of the general statutes so that a person who has been convicted of a felony and committed to confinement in a federal or other state correctional institution or facility or community residence shall have such person's electoral privileges restored. The bill also removes the barriers currently in place regarding payment of all fines in conjunction with the conviction and expands the opportunity for justice-involved individuals living with criminal records, to more fully participate in our democracy and civic engagement.

Research indicates that restoration of voting and other civil rights:

- Produces tangible benefits for both the individuals and their communities
- Reduces disenfranchisement and increases civic engagement, thereby reducing recidivism.

A 2011 study by the Florida Parole Commission<sup>1</sup> found that **former offenders whose civil rights had been restored were much less likely to return to prison than others in the released prisoner population**. The report found that 30,672 offenders had their civil rights restored in calendar years 2009 and 2010 combined. Of those, only 3,406 had committed offenses by May 31, 2011 that resulted in a return to prison or community supervision by the Florida Department of Corrections. **This equates to an 11.1% recidivism rate for ex-felons whose rights were restored**, which contrasts with a 2010 FDOC report that found 33.1% of all state prisoners released from 2001 to 2008 reoffended within three years.

In addition, if prisoners remain citizens and retain their civic status throughout their sentences, then prisoners should be entitled to the most basic of their civil rights - the right to cast a ballot. Disenfranchising this population creates a class of people still subject to state and federal laws, but without a voice in the way they are governed. The proposed legislation provides the opportunity to reinforce the powerful impact of each returning citizen becoming actively engaged and accountable for their future, the future of their families and their communities.

Most criminal justice research focuses on the effectiveness of programs that seek to reduce recidivism by changing offender attitudes and behavior. Reductions in recidivism translate to breaking the cycle of crime and poverty. The proposed legislation continues the efforts of the Legislature to build on past success, maintain momentum of the Second Chance Society Initiative, and provide the tools necessary to ensure that these returning citizens are actively engaged and invested in their reentry process, their families and their communities.

Thank you again for your consideration and the opportunity to testify in support of S.B. 53 and H.B. 7213.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.fcor.state.fl.us/docs/reports/2009-2010ClemencyReport.pdf>