



**To the Co-Chairs and Members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee:  
Testimony SUPPORTING SB 25, AA Restoring Electoral Privileges to Felony Convicts Who  
Are On Parole**

Submitted by Tiheba Bain, Women Against Mass Incarceration

To the co-chairs Senator Flexer, Representative Fox and the esteemed members of the GAE committee, thank you for allowing me the opportunity to speak about why I support immediately eliminating the unfair practice of denying two currently disenfranchised groups in the state of Connecticut – totaling more than 7,000 citizens – their democratic right to vote.

These two groups are:

- O People being held in pre-trial detention (i.e. community corrections centers: Whalley Ave., North Ave., The Meadows) who have not been convicted, and not currently serving a sentence but are being held as they await judgment. This group has not technically lost their right to vote in the State of Connecticut and places such as CA, AL, Cook County IL, DC, Puerto Rico VT and ME all allow this group access to the ballot through absentee voting and/or other methods. \*Approx. 4,000 Citizens
  
- O People who are currently living, working and paying local, state and federal taxes while serving terms of parole. Currently every New England state except Connecticut, along with HI, IL, IN, MI, MT, ND, OH, OR, PA, UT as well as the District of Columbia allow this group to vote.  
\*Approx. 4,600 Citizens

The very first time I voted after my release was for Barak Obama on his second term. It was a proud moment for me, to be able to use my voice as a registered voter. As time went on I would say it was my vote that tipped the scale believing I made a difference. Until one day a notification came in the mail stating my vote did not count due to what was my civil status at the time. A woman without any rights to utilize what I thought was my right, to vote!

Many want to be politically correct and say returning citizen in addressing a formerly incarcerated person. Well I do not! As a citizen you should not have to fight for liberty and justice in your own

country. A citizen, who has been convicted of a crime, loses the right to use their voice at the polls while on parole, yet you say returning citizen.

Do you know formerly incarcerated people face over 600 policy and legal barriers while hoping and praying not to go back to prison? Yet at every turn a door is constantly shut in our faces. Life incentives give people hope, especially people like me who have committed a crime and who have paid my dues by doing prison time. Yet I am constantly retried and sentenced every time I get a door shut in my face. If you deem it correct to use the term returning citizen let it ring true.

Restore the voting rights of those who are on parole. Give them a sense of hope, a hope that life can be different. Even on a small scale, liking having the right to vote can change a person's perception of life.

In conclusion, I investigated the issue with my voting registration and found out because I was on supervised release my vote did not count. I was angered and hated the system but I kept the faith and decided to do what I could to help change laws and policy that restrict formerly incarcerated people from achieving their best life now.

It is time for change! Having a right to vote, is just that a right, not a privilege!

Simply put, the argument against restoration of rights are baseless. The notions that bar thousands of system-involved people from the polls in Connecticut and millions across the nation each election are by-and-large steeped in an antiquated legacy of an exclusionary democracy that taxes all but rewards only a few.

In New England, we bear witness to the fallacy of anti-enfranchisement arguments in each of our states, but particularly Maine and Vermont. These two states are outliers among outliers in the fact that they have never barred the right to vote to any citizen unless convicted of charges pertinent to voting laws – leaving voting rights open even to those that are in prisons and jails.

Remaining New England states Massachusetts, New Hampshire and Rhode Island all are among the nation's most progressive in voter restoration rights, joining just 12 other states and the District of Columbia in ensuring that individuals serving terms of probation and parole have the right to vote.

There have been no recorded increased claims of voter fraud in these other states, allowing them to exist as real-time, ongoing models of a more just societies of where people who live, work and are taxed in their communities can have a say in the way they are governed. It's time that Connecticut joined them. For these reasons, I support **SB 25 to Unlock The Vote**.

Thank you,

Mrs. Tiheba Bain