



**COMMUNITY
LEGAL SERVICES**
IN EAST PALO ALTO

June 18, 2020

The Honorable Thomas J. Umberg
Chair, Senate Elections and Constitutional Amendments Committee
California State Capitol, Room 3076
Sacramento, California 95814

RE: ACA 6 (McCarty) Free The Vote - SUPPORT

Dear Senator Umberg:

Community Legal Services in East Palo Alto ("CLSEPA") writes in strong support of ACA 6, which places a state constitutional amendment on the ballot to restore voting rights to Californians serving a period of parole in California. It's time for California to join the growing national movement to strengthen our democracy by ensuring that everyone - regardless of their past involvement with the criminal legal system - can have their voices counted.

CLSEPA is a non-profit legal organization offering free legal services that improve the lives of low-income families throughout the region specializing in immigration, housing, workers' rights, reentry and criminal records dismissal, and consumer protection.

Felony disenfranchisement in the United States is part of a legacy of racially discriminatory Jim Crow laws that date back to the time of slavery and post-Civil War reconstruction. Our state, sadly, has its own role in this legacy. Not only did California refuse to ratify the 15th Amendment - which prohibits voting restrictions based on race - until 1962, but the Golden State included permanent felony disenfranchisement in its first constitution in 1849. Because of racial disparities in our criminal legal system and the over-policing of communities of color, felony disenfranchisement continues to thwart the political power of Black and Brown Americans today. Three out of four men leaving California prisons are either African American, Latino, or Asian American.

Nationwide, more than 4.5 million people are barred from voting because of a felony conviction. Over 50,000 of these individuals are disenfranchised because they are currently on parole in California. At a time when our national democratic institutions are under threat, California has a responsibility to do more to prevent the silencing of formerly incarcerated people.

Voting is a fundamental right of citizenship. ACA 6 will amend the California Constitution to ensure that Californians on parole can fully participate in our democracy. Giving people returning home from prison access to civic participation is one of the most effective ways to

assure their successful reintegration home. Blocking people on parole from voting means our neighbors who are working, paying taxes, and raising families in this state are deprived of the ability to have a say in the policies and representatives who shape their daily lives. This is out of step with our values as Californians.

For these reasons, CLSEPA strongly supports ACA 6 and respectfully requests your “AYE” vote in committee.

Sincerely,

/s/ Katrina Logan

Katrina Logan
Directing Attorney
Economic Advancement Program

Cc: Members and Committee Staff, Senate Elections & Constitutional Amendments