

Massachusetts Congresswoman Ayanna Pressley sponsors bill to allow felons to vote

“Congresswoman Ayanna Pressley (MA-07) and Senator Peter Welch (D-VT) unveiled the Inclusive Democracy Act, brand new, first-of-its-kind legislation that would end felony disenfranchisement in Federal elections and guarantee the right to vote for incarcerated citizens. The lawmakers’ bill comes as an estimated 4.6 million citizens – disproportionately Black and brown citizens – are denied voting rights because of a criminal conviction.

The legislation was unveiled at a press conference earlier today. Rep. Pressley read an excerpt of a testimony provided by Al-Ameen Patterson, who is currently incarcerated at MIC-Norfolk, at a historic hearing at the Massachusetts State House earlier this year. Footage of the press conference can be viewed [here](#) and photos are available [here](#).

“Too often, citizens behind the wall and those with a record are wrongfully stripped of their sacred right to vote and denied the opportunity to participate in our democracy. With Republicans and the Supreme Court stopping at nothing to undermine voting rights and exclude Black and brown folks from participating in our democracy, we must protect and expand access to the ballot box – including for incarcerated citizens,” said Rep. Pressley. “As someone whose family has been personally impacted by mass incarceration, I’m proud to partner with Senator Welch on the Inclusive Democracy Act to ensure everyone can make their voice heard in our democracy. Momentum is growing in states across the country and Congress must follow suit by swiftly passing this crucial legislation.”

“Our democracy is at its strongest when everyone can equitably

take part in it. Yet millions of Americans are denied their right to engage in our democratic process as a result of antiquated state felony disenfranchisement laws that disproportionately impact Black Americans and women. Today I'm proud to introduce the Inclusive Democracy Act with Congresswoman Pressley, a step forward in restoring the voices of millions of Americans and ensuring everyone has the right to vote," said Sen. Welch. "This bill is all about helping disenfranchised voters who have been systemically robbed of their right to participate in our democratic process. I'm going to keep working to strengthen and modernize the Voting Rights Act and combat practices like gerrymandering designed to deprive marginalized communities of their right to vote. Laws from the Jim Crow-era have no place in modern America, and we must always vigorously oppose and condemn those who scheme to exclude marginalized communities from participating in our democracy."

The practice of felony disenfranchisement is biased, counterproductive, and deters eligible voters from civic engagement. By entangling the criminal legal system in our elections, people who are disproportionately affected, especially Black citizens, are unfairly disenfranchised and excluded from representation. Additionally, there are inconsistent systems across 48 states that treat different crimes as felonies and set different standards for disenfranchisement.

The Inclusive Democracy Act is groundbreaking legislation that would end felony disenfranchisement in Federal elections. Specifically, the bill would:

- Guarantee the right to vote in Federal elections for citizens who have criminal convictions;
- Require State and Federal entities to notify individuals who are convicted, incarcerated, on probation, or on parole of their right to vote in Federal elections;
- Outline the process for citizens in carceral settings to

register to vote by mail, if registration is required by their State;

- Outline the process for citizens in carceral settings to vote by mail, including protecting and prioritizing election mail, curing ballots with mistakes, and casting a provision ballot;

- Ensure citizens in carceral settings have access to information about elections through mechanisms available to them such as the internet, campaigns, and third party groups;

- Provide guidance to State officials to not prosecute citizens in carceral settings who complete an election ballot that includes an election they are not eligible to vote in; and

- Provide a private right of action to enforce this legislation.”-Congresswoman Ayanna Pressley’s Office.