



Hon. Margaret Ransone
Hon. Israel O'Quinn
Virginia House of Delegates
Committee on Privileges and Elections

January 27, 2022

Dear Chair Ransone and Vice Chair O'Quinn:

Fair Elections Center writes to voice its strong support for HJ 9. Virginia voters should have a final say on whether to protect the freedom to vote in their constitution.

Last year, the General Assembly passed SJ 272, which would amend the state constitution to grant an affirmative right to vote for registered Virginia voters, restore the right to people with felony convictions upon their release from incarceration, and add protections for voters with certain disabilities. It has been reintroduced as HJ 9 and must pass again this session to be placed on the ballot for final approval by voters.

Virginia is one of only a few states that restores the freedom to vote to people with felony convictions based on clemency, not law. As with gerrymandering, this practice allows politicians to choose their voters by manipulating the composition of the electorate. It is also deeply unpopular, across party lines: 63% of Americans support restoration upon completion of sentence, including 62% of Republicans. Indeed, in Florida—which has a Republican governor and two Republican U.S. Senators, and where the majority of voters cast their ballot for the Republican presidential candidate in 2016 and 2020—voters adopted a constitutional amendment to restore the freedom to vote to returning citizens who have completed their sentences by an overwhelming margin, with 64.55% supporting the amendment. While Americans may deeply disagree on many issues, rights restoration is not one of them.

Returning citizens are parents, caregivers, veterans, essential workers, small business owners, and community leaders. Once they have been released from incarceration and have rejoined society, they should have the same freedom as other Virginians to hold their representatives accountable and weigh in on laws affecting their rights, children, and livelihoods. **Fair Elections Center respectfully urges the House Privileges and Elections Committee to approve HJ 9 without amendment and send it to the floor for a vote.** Please feel welcome to contact our Policy Director, Michelle Kanter Cohen, at mkantercohen@fairelectionscenter.org or

(202) 331-0114 if the Center can be of assistance to you as you consider this and other election law legislation.

Sincerely,

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