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August 23, 2018

The Honorable Vincent Mazzeo, Assemblyman and Chair, Assembly State and Local Government  
Committee  
2312 New Road, Suite 102  
Northfield, New Jersey 08225-1459

Dear Assemblyman Mazzeo:

Re A-3456/S-2100

We are writing to respectfully urge you to support and promote the passage of the above-referenced legislation that is being considered by your committee. We believe this important bill would not only advance participatory democracy in our state, but also take a big step toward remedying some of the racial injustice that has been a moral stain on New Jersey for generations. We have an opportunity through this bill of taking a big step toward becoming a state that values the vote of every citizen and also corrects a practice that has a hugely disproportionate disenfranchising effect on persons of color.

We understand the initial reluctance that you and others may have to supporting this legislation. However, we believe that you will find that it makes a lot of sense to empower individuals who live in the community as parolees and probationers who work, pay taxes and support their families to make their voices heard about the choices facing their communities through voting.

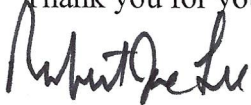
Supporting the enfranchisement of prisoners may be a heavier lift. Even so, we see no positive value in adding to the harsh effects of deprivation of liberty and believe the positive effects of allowing prisoners to vote are persuasive: reduction of disproportionate impact on persons of color and restoration of their sense of citizenship, which increases their investment in the social order, reduces recidivism and improves public safety.

We are mortified that our state is out of step with neighboring states. While none of them enfranchises prisoners, only Delaware likewise denies the vote to prisoners, parolees and probationers. Probationers may vote in both New York and Pennsylvania, while parolees may vote in Pennsylvania and a procedure was initiated in New York this past April that creates a path that can lead parolees to vote there as well. We are even more shamed that some states often associated with endemic racism, e.g., Alabama (which allows some inmates to vote), have a more progressive policy than we do in New Jersey.

An excellent report undergirds the current effort to see this bill become law by the ACLU, League of Women Voters, New Jersey Institute for Social Justice, and others: We Are 1884 No More: Let Us Vote, available at <http://www.njisj.org/1844nomorereport2017>. The Editorial Board of the Star-Ledger supported the effort in its March 26, 2018 editorial (<http://www.newslocker.com/en-us/region/newark/new-jerseys-94000-missing-voters-editorial/view/>).

If we can provide further information on why we believe the enfranchisement of persons serving sentences arising out of criminal convictions is worthy of your support, please let us know.

Thank you for your consideration,



Robert Joe Lee



Caryl Tipton



Hannah Lee