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House Committee on Rules
Rep. Barbara Smith Warner, Chair

Re: HB 2366 — Extending voting rights to incarcerated citizens and those with felony convictions— **SUPPORT.**

Dear Committee Members,

This testimony is offered in support of extending voting rights to incarcerated individuals and those who have been convicted of a felony. Voting rights are a foundation of our democracy and are supported by the Constitution. Voting is one way people can participate in the political process and express their views. The ability to vote also empowers individuals, resulting in long and short-term benefits for communities: decreasing disenfranchisement, alienation and recidivism among its members.

Voting rights can encourage citizens' engagement with society thereby contributing to the health of their communities. In addition to physical confinement, incarceration strips individuals of fundamental freedoms which in turn can result in discouragement and demoralization. These penalties extend beyond the punishment imposed by imprisonment; affecting a felon's ability to work, receive public benefits or vote. Thus when incarcerated or felony convicted individuals are denied voting rights, they are also denied access to the very system with the power to positively change incarceration's collateral consequences on their lives. As a result, extending voting rights can restore an individual's sense of purpose and dignity by granting the ability to control one's destiny through the political process.

The Eight Amendment's prohibition against disproportionate and excessive punishment also supports extending voting rights to imprisoned and felony convicted citizens. While the law recognizes that circumstances of confinement necessarily result in loss of certain freedoms, "the basic concept underlying the Eighth Amendment is nothing less than the dignity of man." *Trop v. Dulles*, 356 U.S. 590, 597–98, (1958). Denial of voting rights often has no relationship to the cause of a person's confinement or conviction. Instead, deprivation of voting rights is an additional punishment disconnected from the original crime. Once punishment for a crime has been levied and paid, a person should be allowed to move on. In sum, voting rights should be extended to incarcerated and felony convicted citizens in the interest of restoring personal dignity, and paving the way for productive political participation.

I respectfully urge you to pass HB 2366 and I thank you for the opportunity to share my views.



Jennifer K. Mikel