



The
CENTER for
VICTIMS of
TORTURE

In support of MN SF 26: Right to vote restoration to individuals convicted of a felony upon completion of any term of incarceration...

February 1, 2023

Dear Chair Latz and the Committee:

Founded in 1985, the Center for Victims of Torture (CVT) is a non-profit organization that is headquartered in Minnesota and has operations in the U.S., Africa and the Middle East. We extend rehabilitative care to survivors of torture and other forms of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment (CIDT); build the capacity of colleague torture rehabilitation programs and human rights defenders worldwide; and engage in advocacy aimed at ending torture and CIDT and supporting the rehabilitation of survivors.

Our Healing, Incarceration, and Policing Program advocates for legislation that uplifts and supports our clients and communities in Minnesota while increasing equity and accountability in our public safety infrastructure. We are committed to achieving public safety that prioritizes the needs and rights of our communities, including the rights of people during and after a period of incarceration. With a long history of advocating for dignity for all, CVT supports SF 26. Those who have served time in prison should not be further punished after the completion of their sentence. They certainly should not be dehumanized by having their right to civically engage be permanently revoked or withheld for excessive periods of time after being released from incarceration.

Those released from prison make up our loved ones, neighbors, and much of our state's workforce. Over 50,000 Minnesotans live in our communities, pay taxes, and support local businesses. Many of them are raising families and/or prioritize community development and service. Yet, they are unable to vote for their own representation or on ballot issues that impact their lives. This felony disenfranchisement law is a relic of Jim Crow laws and Black Codes, and continues to perpetuate systemic racism and class inequities in our carceral and electoral systems. It's past time for Minnesota to join the eight states that have restored the right to vote to all non-incarcerated people in the past six years.

We know through our work with clients at CVT that being stripped of one's ability to participate in civic processes – being stripped of one's voice – is devastating to one's sense of self and dignity, acting as another hurdle to overcome while healing. People who have experienced incarceration need to experience restoration and redemption. Restoring their basic civil rights restores them of their voice and dignity and aids in the healing process. Restored people restore our communities. In the end, successful re-entry makes all of our communities safer by ensuring that people coming home from prison are able to support themselves and their families through work and can become engaged, active, and have a voice in their communities. We urge the Committee to pass this important legislation. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

On behalf of CVT:

Ta'Mara Hill, Policy Officer, Healing, Incarceration, & Policing Program