

Offered by City Councilors Julia Mejia, Ruthzee Louijeune, Tania Fernandes Anderson, Breadon, Durkan, FitzGerald, Murphy, Pepen, Santana, Weber and Worrell



**CITY OF BOSTON
IN CITY COUNCIL**

IN THE YEAR TWO THOUSAND TWENTY-FOUR

**ORDER FOR A HEARING TO ADDRESS CRITICAL ISSUES IN JAIL-BASED
VOTING AND EMPOWER INCARCERATED COMMUNITIES TO STRENGTHEN
DEMOCRACY**

- WHEREAS,** While individuals incarcerated for felony convictions in Massachusetts cannot vote, residents awaiting trial and those convicted of misdemeanors are eligible, including the roughly six hundred voters currently residing at Nashua Street Jail and the Suffolk County House of Corrections who can legally vote but suffer from significant barriers to casting their ballot, accessing important voter information, and receiving relevant civic education; *and*
- WHEREAS,** Incarcerated civic leaders and inclusive democracy organizers have led the charge to protect jail-based voting rights and end felony disenfranchisement across the Commonwealth, including jail-based voting volunteers with the Empowering Descendant Communities to Unlock Democracy (EDC) project, which recently identified five critical issues during the 2024 election season in Suffolk County and beyond; *and*
- WHEREAS,** Despite the statutory obligation of state authorities under the 2022 VOTES Act to identify eligible incarcerated voters and implement jail-based voting, current technologies at the House of Corrections are inadequate for systematically determining jail-based voter eligibility in a timely manner; *and*
- WHEREAS,** Nonpartisan civic groups face challenges providing resources and information due to the absence of state or local policies and accountability procedures for implementing jail-based voting; *and*
- WHEREAS,** Jail-based voters struggle to access timely election information due to restricted internet access and poor information dissemination, often relying on community volunteers for crucial election details; *and*
- WHEREAS,** Limited budgetary allocations for translation and interpretation services prevent many incarcerated voters from accessing nonpartisan voter materials in their

preferred languages, leaving eligible voters without essential voting information;
and

WHEREAS, Establishing effective jail-based voting processes requires cross-institutional collaboration between election officials, jails, advocates, and incarcerated individuals, potentially necessitating special legislation; *and*

WHEREAS, Every eligible voter should have equal access to voting, yet systemic barriers disproportionately affecting people of color, LGBTQ+ individuals, and those with disabilities or mental health challenges continue to prevent hundreds of incarcerated voters from reliably obtaining ballots, voting information, and civic education; ***NOW THEREFORE BE IT***

ORDERED: That the appropriate committee of the Boston City Council hold a hearing to convene all relevant public officials and administrative authorities responsible for overseeing the implementation of jail-based voting in Suffolk County jails.

Filed in Council: October 28, 2024