



# Southern Delaware Alliance for Racial Justice

... ending racism and its corrosive consequences

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## **STATEMENT ON HOUSE BILL NUMBER 4 BEFORE THE HOUSE ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE JUNE 12, 2019**

Good afternoon Chairperson Longhurst and members of the Administration Committee. My name is Bruce Bolander. I am a resident of Lewes and am here today on behalf of the Southern Delaware Alliance for Racial Justice, a non-partisan organization based in Lewes whose mission is educating, informing, and advocating for racial justice, equality, and fair opportunity. We appreciate the opportunity to speak to you today about House Bill Number 4.

Because of the Committee's lengthy agenda today, I will limit my comments on behalf of the Alliance to the first section of the Bill. The Alliance strongly supports the striking of all but the most serious drug offenses from the list of violent felonies. The higher sentences that result from the current treatment of less serious drug offenses as violent crimes often result in unnecessarily long sentences and contribute to Delaware's relatively high rate of incarceration. In addition, these higher sentences typically have the greatest impact on persons of color and the communities in which they live.

The Alliance believes that reducing sentences for less serious drug offenses can help bring down our State's high incarceration levels without any meaningful negative impact on public safety.

On behalf of the Alliance, I thank the Administration Committee for its attention and urge it to act favorably on the Bill so that it can be voted on promptly by the full House.



## The League of Women Voters of Delaware Supports the JJ Johnson Sentencing Reform Act (HB 4)

“By now, the debate is over: our nation grossly over-incarcerates its people. The United States has less than five percent of the world’s population and nearly one-quarter of its prisoners....All told, one in three people in the United States has some type of criminal record. No other industrialized country comes close. This system grew over decades in plain sight, and only a broad and bold national response will end it.”<sup>1</sup>

According to the Prison Policy Institute, Delaware’s incarceration rate of 756 per 100,000 population is worse than the U.S. rate of 698 per 100,000. And this is larger than any other nation.<sup>2</sup>

“Mass incarceration simply is not necessary to keep our communities safe. Today, crime and murder rates remain near record lows nationwide....In fact, 27 states have reduced both imprisonment and crime together from 2006 to 2014. It is increasingly clear that reform and safety go together.”<sup>3</sup>

The League of Women Voters strongly supports the major changes to our sentencing law proposed in HB 4, the JJ Johnson Sentencing Reform Act.

- Striking most drug crimes (not including high level drug dealing) from the "violent felony list" is a huge reform that will correct all that was wrong with the “War on Drugs” laws enacted decades ago. Those laws were a major cause of the dramatic rise in incarceration that has also had a significant impact on the racial inequity in our justice system as in others throughout the nation.
- Since our state abolished parole in 1989, very few prisoners are released. HB 4 will help correct this additional contributor to our high incarceration rate. Nearly every state has a policy allowing for the parole of inmates with certain serious medical conditions.<sup>4</sup> HB 4 will establish a system to enable the release, not only of prisoners who are sick, but also those who are old or have demonstrated extraordinary rehabilitation.
- The Sentencing Commission to be established by HB 4 should bring improved consistency in sentencing practices and also support the collection of much-needed data. This will enable us to identify future needed reforms in our criminal justice system.

It is our hope that these important reforms will facilitate a major reduction in the number of prisoners who no longer pose a risk to communities. Not only will this reduce the cost of housing those prisoners, but it should reduce the use of expensive overtime pay for our correctional officers as well as reducing stress on the system.

It is also our hope that savings will be shifted to much needed mental health and drug treatment programs so that persons who need such services can be diverted to those resources rather than being housed in prisons that should be focused on rehabilitation of criminals.

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Waldman, President, Brennan Center for Justice, in Foreword to *Ending Mass Incarceration: Ideas from Today’s Leaders*, May 18, 2019, BrennanCenter.org

<sup>2</sup> [www.prisonpolicy.org](http://www.prisonpolicy.org) 2018

<sup>3</sup> Waldman

<sup>4</sup> [www.ncsl.org/](http://www.ncsl.org/)



## Why Delaware needs voting by mail

The League of Women Voters of the United States believes that voting is a fundamental citizen right that must be guaranteed. The LWV of Delaware bases its action on the LWVUS position.

*The League of Women Voters supports HB 175, which allows for voting by mail.*

The primary reason we support this bill is that it increases voting. By providing the opportunity to cast ballots in the mail, voters will be able to avoid long lines at polling stations, and won't have to take time off from work to exercise their right to vote. Oregon, the first state to have all-vote-by mail, has consistently ranked among the states with the highest voter turnout. Oregon voting rates are especially high among young voters and in midterm elections when turnout traditionally lags. In 2016, 68% of Oregon residents voted, which is 8% above the national average, and 45% of voters under 34 voted, which is twice the national average.<sup>1</sup>

Another reason for supporting this bill is that vote by mail makes the ballot box accessible to voters who have difficulties getting to the polls, such as working families, students, and individuals with disabilities. It makes sure that every eligible American who wants to vote is able to make their voice heard.

Voting by mail may also reduce costs by reducing the number of poll workers and polling places. A Pew study cited that in Colorado, costs decreased an average of 40%.<sup>2</sup>

Those that are against vote by mail cite security issues as a major problem. Oregon and Washington have addressed this by creating secure drop off sites and a centralized ballot review. They also have implemented a signature verification process, that checks the ballot to the registration form. Some worry about coercion; this may happen infrequently. <<any research done how often coercion does happen? Find and footnote it.>>.

In some ways, mail-in ballots will actually be more secure, as paper ballots are immune to cyber-attack. You cannot hack paper.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/elections/you-can-t-hack-paper-how-oregon-fights-election-meddling-n930481>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/all-mail-elections.aspx>



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## CHARGING INFRASTRUCTURE FOR ELECTRIC VEHICLES

### Support for HB 177

### June 2019

This is a timely bill, supported by the League of Women Voters of Delaware. First of all, we recognize that the transportation sector is the largest single contributor of carbon dioxide emissions in the State.<sup>1</sup> It is clear then that anything we can do to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions generated by cars and trucks will be helpful. A car powered by electricity will emit only two-thirds the amount of carbon dioxide compared with a car powered by electricity, even if the electricity is generated by fossil fuels. The energy saving is even greater, of course, if the electricity is generated by renewable sources.<sup>2</sup>

By passing and implementing this bill, the State will make a strong statement in support of alternatives to fossil fuels for car and truck travel. By passing on the cost of recharging stations on state property to the consumer, this effort will be revenue neutral.

The League has studied fuel options for motor vehicles, and concludes that a reduction in carbon dioxide emissions from these vehicles will be helpful in attaining an environmentally sound future, in addition to providing healthier air. We urge this committee to vote HB 177 out of committee and on to the next leg of its legislative journey.

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Energy Information Administration, 2016 <https://www.eia.gov/state/?sid=DE>

<sup>2</sup> "How Green Are Electric Cars?", by Sean Clarke, *The Guardian* December, 2017 <https://www.theguardian.com/football/ng-interactive/2017/dec/25/how-green-are-electric-cars>