

Sen. Taylor: Dem. legislators introduce Unlock the Vote package

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(MADISON) – Today, Senator Lena Taylor (D-Milwaukee) stood alongside Representative Jodi Emerson (D-Eau Claire) and Representative David Crowley (D-Milwaukee) in defense of two fundamental aspects of our Democracy; one’s right to vote, and fair representation in one’s government with no exceptions. The trio introduced the “Unlock the Vote” and Prison-Gerrymandering Elimination bills. The first bill would restore voting rights to individuals immediately upon release from prison, whether or not they have remaining parole, probation or extended supervision requirements. The second bill would, for the purposes of drawing district lines, require incarcerated individuals to be counted as residents of their home districts rather than where they are currently serving their sentence. After introducing the package of bills, Senator Taylor made the following comments: “65,000 Wisconsinites can’t vote because of a past conviction that has resulted in some form of additional community supervision. Yet, these same people work, pay taxes, rent or own homes, utilize city, county, state, and federal services, like every other citizen. They are impacted in the same manner and deserve the same voice in who represents their interests, and makes decisions affecting their lives. But in Wisconsin, this population of residents are treated like the “Walking dead”, in terms of civic engagement. They have no say in who represents them in the government. This needs to change and the “Unlock the Vote” bill is a concrete step in the right direction.”

Representative Emerson echoed Senator Taylor’s comments, stating: “Casting a vote is a civil right and is an essential component of our democracy. Civil rights do not disappear because of your past. Some of these include a right to a fair trial, the right to government services and the right to a public education. You are

entitled to these rights even if you are on probation and parole, so why should the civil right of voting be any different?”

Regarding Prison Gerrymandering, Representative Crowley added:

“Rather than counting prisoners at their home addresses for redistricting data, the Census counts them as residents of the prison. This prison gerrymandering significantly weakens the political power of Black communities, and with 64% of our current prison population set to return home in 5 years or less, it is crucial that we are counting these individuals where they actually live and not just where they are currently housed. Legislative redistricting must be based on accurate Census data in order to ensure communities receive equitable political representation.”