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Wisconsin Democracy Restoration Act Introduced in Assembly *Legislation seeks restoration of voting rights for 42,000 Wisconsin Citizens*

Madison – Today, State Representative Tamara Grigsby (D-Milwaukee) introduced legislation that will restore voting rights for 42,000 Wisconsin citizens and help communities foster public safety through increased civic engagement. The Wisconsin Democracy Restoration Act restores voting rights to incarcerated individuals following their period of imprisonment. Under current law, individuals with felony convictions are denied the right to vote until completion of probation, parole, and extended supervision.

“After their period of incarceration, parolees and probationers return to our communities and our places of work,” Grigsby said. “These men and women have served their time and now seek reintegration into society. As their neighbors and family members and, above all, as their fellow citizens, who are we to deny their right to vote? This legislation takes a step forward in addressing the need for every citizen to be invested in their community, regardless of past mistakes and wrongdoings.”

According to Grigsby, the Wisconsin Democracy Restoration Act is critical to combating the racial disparities that hinder Wisconsin’s Black communities. In Wisconsin, one in nine Black voters has lost the right to vote, compared to one in fifty voters statewide. As a result, Wisconsin has the 11th highest rate of Black voter disenfranchisement in the United States.

“Too many in the Black community have been divorced from political life due to our disenfranchisement policies, yet we must remember that our current voting laws impact all Wisconsinites, black and white, urban and rural,” Grigsby said. “The legitimacy to lead stems from the strength of our democracy, which is precisely why the Wisconsin Democracy Restoration Act is so important. We can only hope to stand for democracy in the world if we first stand for it for everyone at home.”

Legislation similar to the Wisconsin Democracy Restoration Act has been implemented in 18 states since 1997, including neighboring Illinois and Michigan. In addition, voting rights for individuals released from incarceration are supported by the American Bar Association, the American Probation and Parole Association, the National Black Police Association, and more than 70 Wisconsin-based organizations, including the American Civil Liberties Union of Wisconsin.

The Wisconsin Democracy Restoration Act is coauthored by Representative Marlin Schneider (D-Wisconsin Rapids), Representative Joe Parisi (D-Madison), and Senator Lena Taylor (D-Milwaukee). In addition to the authors, this legislation has already gained extensive support, with 16 cosponsors throughout the legislature.

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