

OPINION

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A Voting Rights Victory in Maryland

Almost 6 million U.S. citizens are effectively locked out of the democratic process

BY MARC MORIAL

Thousands of Marylanders will regain the right to cast their ballots this election year, thanks to the state's lawmakers.



The Maryland House and Senate recently voted to override a veto by Governor Larry Hogan to ensure that ex-offenders will automatically get their right to vote back once they've been released from prison.

Previously, Maryland required all individuals with past felony convictions to complete all terms of their probation and parole before their access to the polls could

be restored through a lengthy and confusing process. That policy — which disproportionately impacted communities of color — was unduly punitive.

It delayed the restoration of voting rights for men and women who'd already paid their debt to society by completing their prison sentences. This kind of voter disenfranchisement must not be tolerated in a nation that professes to be governed by democratic tenets.

So as of March 10, an estimated 40,000 Maryland men and women currently on felony probation or parole will have their right to vote restored. For many of them, this will come in time to vote for local

and national leaders, including our nation's next president.

Maryland is joining 13 other states, plus the District of Columbia, in immediately restoring the voting rights of ex-offenders upon their release — plus two states, Maine and Vermont, that don't strip anyone with a criminal conviction of their voting rights, including when they're behind bars.

While there's much to applaud, this victory isn't enough. That's because 11 states permanently bar certain ex-offenders from ever voting again.

Today, almost 6 million U.S. citizens are effectively locked out of the democratic process because of laws that disenfranchise citi-

zens convicted of felony offenses. "These restrictions serve only to further alienate and isolate millions of Americans as they work to regain normalcy in their lives," said Representative John Conyers, a Michigan Democrat who's authored legislation that would safeguard voting rights for ex-offenders nationally.

Because of the enduring tangle of race and the criminal justice system in our nation, convicted felons disproportionately come from communities of color, effectively disenfranchising not only individuals but entire communities. Throughout our nation, nearly one in 13 African-American adults is banned from voting be-

cause of laws that disenfranchise the formerly incarcerated.

And it should come as no surprise that the states with the harshest policies just happen to be those with legacies of slavery, segregation, discrimination, and voter suppression. Just like voter ID laws, felon disenfranchisement is a tactic that suppresses voter turnout.

Among other benefits, voting promotes public safety. Civic engagement establishes a vested interest in the well-being of the communities where ex-offenders make their homes, work, and pay taxes. We're a stronger and truer democracy when all of our citizens enjoy this fundamental right.

The Problem with 'Blue Lives Matter'

Tragedy creates some confusion

BY JILL RICHARDSON

We're not long into summer, but already we're long on tragedy. Police shootings of black men in Minnesota, Louisiana, and beyond. A mass shooting of police officers in Dallas.



Yet this surplus of tragedy seems to have created some confusion. So let's clear things up.

There's a difference between cops killing unarmed black people and the horrific murder of cops that just occurred in Dallas.

I don't wish to diminish the losses in Dallas, or the loss suffered any time a cop is killed. That's a tragedy beyond words. But it's still different from the

deaths of Alton Sterling, Philando Castile, Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, and so many other black men and women who've lost their lives at the hands of the police.

The cops who killed Sterling and Castile were employed to protect the public. Sterling and Castile, in other words, paid the salaries of their own killers with their tax dollars. The murderer in Dallas, on the other hand, was no public servant.

Anyone who kills a cop faces severe penalties. The Dallas shooter, after all, is now dead. But cops who kill unarmed black men, most of the time, walk free. Indictments are uncommon, and convictions are rare.

Any time a cop is killed, the entire nation agrees that it was a crime and a tragedy. President Obama came back early from

Europe to speak at a memorial service for the officers in Dallas, where former President George W. Bush also spoke. That's not necessarily the case when cops kill black men.

value as human beings by digging for any imperfection to justify the act. But that's what happens to black men killed by cops.

Police departments or unsympathetic journalists dig up old mug

shots, petty rap sheets, or any suggestion the deceased might have used drugs or had a record, even if none of those alleged crimes would have been punishable by death. They blame victims for not following instructions, or diminish the problem by calling out "black-on-black violence."

the killing of cops and the killing of black men by cops is that both are tragedies. In both scenarios, beautiful human lives are snuffed out for no reason at all.

So why is it right to say "Black

Anyone who kills a cop faces severe penalties. The Dallas shooter, after all, is now dead. But cops who kill unarmed black men, most of the time, walk free. Indictments are uncommon, and convictions are rare.

Moreover, nobody is now looking into the records of the murdered officers to find out if they ever did anything wrong. Nobody wonders if perhaps it's their own fault that they're dead — because of course it isn't.

It's unspeakably wrong to blame victims of a heinous crime for their own deaths, or to diminish their

Lives Matter" but not "Blue Lives Matter"? Because our nation already believes that cops' lives matter. But not everybody values black lives, and that's the problem.

The only equivalence between

OtherWords columnist Jill Richardson is the author of Recipe for America: Why Our Food System Is Broken and What We Can Do to Fix It. OtherWords.org.



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