HOW CAN YOU PLAY A PART?

☐ Attend a SURJ/Mass POWER meeting to learn more about their cause.

☐ Sign up for the Mass POWER email newsletter at: https://bit.ly/MPRight2Vote

☐ Share their social media @masspowervote

☐ Shoot them an email at: masspowervote@gmail.com

@MASSPOWervote @SURJNYC

zine by sumi dey
SURJ stands for Showing Up for Racial Justice.

It is a national network of groups and individuals organizing white people for racial justice.

SURJ moves white communities to act as a part of a multi-racial majority for justice with passion and accountability, through community organizing, mobilization, and ecuation.

“We’re taking responsibility for the education of white folks.”
SURJ members from the greater Boston area gathered in Cambridge to learn about the signature collection campaign to place an amendment on the 2022 ballot to restore the right for prisoners to vote.

From October to November 1st, SURJ will be collecting 80,000+ signatures to get the issue on the ballot.

Senior members explained the signature collection process, the history of the movement, and handed out clipboards with signature sheets. Each SURJ volunteer was tasked to collect around 150 signatures from registered MA voters.

“Build power, change lives.” - Sarah Duncan, senior organizer
A Timeline of Voting Rights in Massachusetts

1821: Amendment to the Massachusetts constitution to require citizenship for voting.

1850: Literacy tests required for voting.

1870: 15th Amendment grants voting rights to African American men.

1920: 19th Amendment grants women the right to vote.

1974: Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court rules that citizens incarcerated in Massachusetts are entitled to vote by absentee ballot.

1976: Carl Velleca, who is incarcerated at MCI-Concord prison, announces his candidacy for Concord Selectman. Soon after his announcement, Massachusetts legislators file five bills to restrict incarcerated people’s voting rights.

1978: Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court rules that incarcerated people must vote in the district where they lived prior to incarceration, unless they can demonstrate they have willingly established themselves as residents of the prison district. Court orders the Concord Board of Registrar to remove 300 prisoners from the voter registry and to hold another registration session and question each prisoner about their intent to reside in the prison district.

1983: Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court rules that the legislature must create a way for incarcerated people to register to vote through absentee ballot in the district where they lived prior to incarceration, since statutes at the time required people to register to vote in person unless unable to do so because of a physical disability.

1997: People incarcerated in MCI-Norfolk prison plan to file paperwork to form the first-ever prison political action committee (PAC).

1997: In response to the PAC, acting Governor Cellucci holds a press conference from a Nashua Street Jail cell, at which he announces he has filed a constitutional amendment to disenfranchise people in Massachusetts prisons. He also signs Executive Order 399 barring prisoners from forming PACs, and directs the Department of Correction "to enforce an absolute prohibition on prisoners engaging in any form of solicitation of money or other things of value for political purposes." Cellucci instructs the Department of Correction to enforce the law vigorously, "using punishments such as isolation, restriction and loss of privileges.

2001: Governor Cellucci signs Bill 2883, prohibiting people incarcerated in state prison for felony convictions from voting in presidential and municipal elections, and changing the requirements for obtaining absentee ballots.
Mass POWER stands for Massachusetts Prisoners and Organizers Working for Enfranchisement and Restoration.

Mass POWER is a campaign and a coalition consisting of the Harvard Prison Divestment Campaign, Families for Justice as Healing, the African American Coalition Committee at MCI-Norfolk, BLACC at Souza Baranowski, and other concerned citizens, incarcerated people and their loved ones committed to restoring the right to vote to people who are incarcerated.

In 2016, a group of free-world and incarcerated people in Massachusetts started Ballots Over Bars (now Mass POWER), a campaign to raise awareness about criminal disenfranchisement in Massachusetts.

This campaign is the culmination of decades of work incarcerated people have done to resist the penal state and build political power inside, and incarcerated people have been fighting for their voting rights in Massachusetts for more than 40 years.

“We seek to raise awareness of the history of criminal disenfranchisement in Massachusetts and challenge it, particularly since Massachusetts was the most recent state to take away the right to vote from incarcerated people – which it did in 2000 due to fear of prisoners organizing.”