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This week, Congressmember Nikema Williams and Senators Jeff Merkley and Cory Booker reintroduced the Abolition Amendment (SJR 33 / HJR 72) which would revise the 13th Amendment.

Historically, the 13th Amendment is the landmark abolition legislation in the United States. However, in the same breath that it sets out to abolish slavery and involuntary servitude, it states “except as a punishment for crime.”

This exception has perpetuated a legacy of slavery and oppression within the criminal justice system, leading to the systemic exploitation of incarcerated persons who, in some cases, are forced to work under threat of punishment, such as solitary confinement or longer sentences. At best, incarcerated persons are often paid nothing at all for their work or mere pennies.

The latest Global Slavery Index has placed the U.S. among only 17 countries in the world with state-imposed forced labor – one of the “most egregious” forms of modern slavery, according to the report. It notes that while the U.S. has the 5th highest government response score on tackling modern slavery globally, it is undermined overall by its laws allowing for slavery in prison.

As the largest anti-slavery community, Freedom United leads a campaign calling for an amendment of the 13th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution so that legal slavery is abolished in the U.S. once and for all.

Amend the 13th campaign lead, Krysta Bisnauth, welcomes the opportunity the reintroduction presents. “We applaud Congressmember Williams and Senators Merkley and Booker for reintroducing the Abolition Amendment, giving Congress a chance to finish what it started in 1865 and end legal slavery in the U.S. – no exceptions.”

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