

CHRIS WEST
Legislative District 42
Baltimore County

Judicial Proceedings Committee

Vice Chair, Baltimore County
Senate Delegation



THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Annapolis Office
James Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street, Room 303
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
410-841-3648 · 301-858-3648
800-492-7122 Ext. 3648
Chris.West@senate.state.md.us

District Office
1134 York Road, Suite 200
Lutherville -Timonium, MD 21093
410-823-7087

January 22, 2020

The Honorable Paul Pinsky
Senate Education, Health & Environmental Affairs Committee
2 West Miller Senate Building
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: Senate Bill 22 – Election Law – Polling Places at Continuing Care Retirement Communities

Dear Chairman Pinsky and Members of the Committee

Senate Bill 22 is similar to last year's Senate Bill 411, but there is one significant change.

Two years ago, I stood outside a polling place in east Towson on a cold, drizzly Election Day greeting voters. Maryland has 38 licensed Continuing Care Retirement Communities statewide, and they contain over 16,000 dwelling units. One of them was located in the precinct where I was stationed. Three times during the day, a jitney bus from that CCRC drove up to the polling place, and each time, a mere handful of voters emerged to cast their ballots. I asked the jitney driver where the rest of the residents of the CCRC were, and he surmised that they chose to stay home due to the foul weather.

Following the election, I spoke to residents of Broadmead, another licensed CCRC in my district. They told me that because there is a polling place located inside Broadmead, most of the Broadmead residents voted. They didn't have to go outside on a cold, rainy day and brave a journey on slippery roads on a jitney bus.

Senate Bill 22 attempts to encourage the over 16,000 residents of CCRCs across the State to vote. It provides that any CCRC with at least 200 residents has the right to have a polling place in the CCRC building. The CCRC will have the option as to whether to have a polling place onsite or not. If established, the polling place could serve only the CCRC residents or could serve nearby residents as well. That would be worked out between the CCRC and the local election board.

Senate Bill 22 imposes three conditions on the establishment of a polling place at a CCRC: (1) the CCRC must make the polling place available without charge to the local election board; (2)

the polling place in the CCRC must meet all applicable requirements for a polling place under the State Election Code and the regulations issued by the State Board of Elections; and (3) the CCRC must provide assistance to the local election board in recruiting election judges from among the residents of the CCRC to staff the polling place.

This last requirement was added to this year's bill to respond to a concern raised by Committee members last year. The concern was that if we were to provide for polling places at CCRCs, why not at nursing homes or assisted living facilities. Most residents of CCRCs are elderly but remain active citizens. My parents, for example, lived at a CCRC for the final decade and a half of their lives, and for most of that period, they retained their cars and lived very mobile and independent lives. They could have staffed a polling place at their CCRC. By contrast, residents in nursing homes and assisted living facilities are much more infirm and much less likely to be able to withstand the physically taxing duties of manning a polling place from 7 a.m. until 8 p.m. on Election Day.

Time and again, this legislative body has passed legislation to remove barriers to voting in Maryland. I believe that with the passage of Senate Bill 22, it is far more likely that senior citizens living in licensed CCRCs will find it easier and more convenient to exercise their right to vote. For this reason, I urge a favorable report on Senate Bill 22.