

January 16, 2019

Testimony on HB 37
Election Law - References to Absentee Voting in Communications – Mail in Voting
Ways and Means

Position: Favorable

Common Cause Maryland supports HB 37, which would require the State Board of Elections and local board of elections to refer to absentee ballots as mail in vote ballots, a seamless change that would help eliminate confusion about the current system and encourage participation.

With low voter participation during our elections, the state should become resourceful in identifying ways to encourage citizen participation. We believe this proposed change to the current no-excuse ballot policy is a step in that direction. "Absentee voting" in Maryland is intended to eliminate many of the burdens that discourage voters from voting, creating greater accessibility and equity in our elections. While many are taking advantage of the program, we believe there may be voters who are not aware that voting by mail is an option and that an excuse is not needed to request a ballot.

Pew Research Center found that out of the registered voters who did not vote in 2016, 14% cited being busy or conflicting schedule, 12% were ill or disabled, 8% were out of town or away from home, 3% had transportation problems, and 2% cited inconvenient hours or polling places. All of the reasons cited in addition to issues like long lines at the polls are things that could be addressed through mail-in voting. The State Board of Elections and local board of elections just need to ensure that voters know this option is available. Changing the name of our current system to vote-by-mail ballots will help to achieve that.

Mail-in ballots are essential in making sure that the voices of those who cannot vote in person will still be heard. This simple change has the potential to ensure that more voters understand our current system and are able to conveniently participate in elections. For those reasons Common Cause Maryland supports HB 37 and encourages a favorable vote.

