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Ways and Means Committee

Education Subcommittee

Finance Resources Subcommittee



The Maryland House of Delegates
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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

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Support HB142- Election Law – Voting Order Priority – Individuals who Need Extra Assistance

Dear Chairwoman Kaiser and Members of the Ways and Means Committee,

Thank you for your consideration of HB142. This legislation requires a chief election judge to give voting priority order to citizens who need extra assistance at the polls based on guidelines developed by the State Board of Elections. The legislation is intended to encourage those who would be unable to comfortably wait in long lines to participate fully in the political process. HB142 requires that polling places post visible notices that special assistance is available if requested and that election judges allow voters for whom it may be extremely difficult or painful to wait in line to request expedited check-in and ballot issuance.

The National Organization on Disability reports that individuals with disabilities are between 12-20% less likely to vote than those without challenges and are seriously underrepresented at the polls. Sadly, those who have the most trouble voting tend to become discouraged and disenfranchised, but may actually need a voice in our political system the most. While discussing this bill, I have been surprised by how many people believe that accessibility is not a real issue at the polls and that those who have difficulty should just vote by mail. This view is contrary to the spirit of voter accessibility and inclusion and to the Help America Vote Act of 2002 which requires states to provide the same opportunity for access and independence to all voters and mandates that any alternative must offer voters with disabilities the same opportunity to vote in person as other citizens.

Primary obstacles to voting for the disabilities community include problems with accessibility and long lines according to the Governmental Accountability Office. It is important to note that while a 1-2 hour wait may be an annoying inconvenience to many of us, for someone with a disability or a child with a disability it may be a painful and insurmountable impediment.

Some states are such as Texas are implementing systems such as curbside voting for voter with disabilities and for parents with young children under 5. Others, such as Georgia and Alabama, guarantee that senior citizens or those with a disability can skip to the front of the line while voting. I urge this committee to consider HB 142 to require that the State Board of Elections draft regulations to allow all of our citizens to participate fully in the political process.