

MARY L. WASHINGTON, PH.D  
*Legislative District 43*  
Baltimore City

Education, Health, and  
Environmental Affairs Committee

*Chair*  
Joint Committee on Ending  
Homelessness

*Chair*  
Joint Committee on Children,  
Youth, and Families



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## SUPPORT – SB 766

### State Board of Elections and Local Boards of Elections - Membership and Staff

Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee

Testimony of Senator Mary Washington, March 3, 2021

Chair Pinsky, Vice-Chair Kagan and Members of the Committee,

SB766 is a bill that aims to ensure election integrity for our election systems and equal access to the polls for all Marylanders. Right now, our State Board of Elections is not equipped to address the inequities that occur in ballot access, and our local boards are not adequately representative of the counties they serve. SB766 addresses these concerns in three different ways:

First, it requires that all members of the State Board of Elections have extensive knowledge of Maryland's election laws and at least 5 years of experience in administering elections. Those tasked with keeping our elections secure and efficient should not be appointed unless they are experts in the field. Every member of the board with intimate knowledge of our election's security systems but not enough knowledge about secure election administration introduces a point of weakness to our elections. The bill adds a provision that the Maryland Association of Election Officials submits one name to the Board as well.

Second, it targets racial disparities in our elections. SB766 requires that the State Board appoint a Racial Equity Coordinator who will ensure equity in treatment and access to resources in the election process, investigate racial disparities in ballot access and voter turnout, make recommendations to the State Board on ways to improve racial equity in our elections, and submit an annual report to the General Assembly with details about all of these activities and recommendations. The State Board will be required to publish this report online publicly.

A 2014 Brennan Center study found that polling stations serving places with higher proportions of Black residents had fewer polling machines and workers and longer lines in general elections. The Brennan Center found similar results last year, specifically that in Prince George's County, thirteen precincts ran out of ballots on Election Day because the County's Board of Elections underestimated the number of people who would vote in person. We need this new racial equity coordinator to ensure these kinds of disparities do not occur in the future.

Finally, SB766 overhauls the appointment process for local Boards of Elections. In Maryland, members of local Boards of Elections are appointed by the Governor, which creates an unfair partisan advantage to whoever holds the Governor's office. This bill would shift the Governor's power to appoint and remove members of local Boards of Elections to local jurisdictions. This is an important step in ensuring that our election officials' powers are derived from the people they serve.

The Boards of Elections in Prince George's County, Baltimore City, and Montgomery County, which overwhelmingly vote for Democrats, are led by Republican members appointed by our Republican Governor. At some point in the future, when a Democrat fills the Governorship, Boards of Elections in Maryland's rural counties that vote overwhelmingly Republican may be led by Democrats. Neither of these scenarios are representative of the voters these Boards serve.

This bill is a crucial overhaul of our election system to make sure that all Marylanders are fully and equally represented in our Boards of Elections. In continuing the General Assembly's mission to protect election integrity, increase voting access, and ensure fair representation, I ask that you for a favorable report on SB766.

In partnership,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Mary Washington". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "M" and a long, sweeping underline.

Senator Mary Washington, District 43, Baltimore City