



Maryland Association of Election Officials

Representing the Local Election Boards of the State of Maryland

February 16, 2023

Senator Brian J. Feldman, Chair
Maryland House Ways and Means Committee
Room 131, House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401-1991

RE: S379 - Support

Chair Atterbeary and Committee Members:

My name is Katherine Berry. I am the Election Director in Carroll County and the chair of the Maryland Association of Election Officials (MAEO) Legislative Committee. MAEO represents the local boards of elections throughout the State of Maryland. I am writing today representing MAEO to support HB535 – Election Law – Ballots – Processing and Reporting Procedures with an amendment.

MAEO believes that allowing mail-in ballots to be canvassed prior to the start of early voting will

1. Help voters to feel that their vote is more inclusive in election night results
2. Gives more flexibility to candidates who wish to attend the canvass
3. Allows for a larger portion of results to be provided on election night

This bill allows for us to open, duplicate, and scan ballots beginning 8 days prior to election day, but also allows for a waiver to be granted by the State Board of Elections if there are not a substantial number of ballots to canvass. As evidenced in the 2022 Election Cycle, the majority of mail-in ballots are not returned to our offices until closer to the start of early voting, so flexibility for a waiver to be granted is helpful in unique circumstances that an LBE may be managing.

MAEO supports the bill's allowance of opening, duplicating and scanning the mail-in ballots ahead of time. The local boards of elections have already been curing ballots to the greatest extent possible, so this would just codify that practice.

The 2-day receipt period for ballots outlined in the bill will prove to be a significant challenge, especially with the rise of web-delivered mail-in ballots. These ballots require manual review and data entry, unlike mail-in ballots with barcodes. Factors such as daily returned ballot volume, staff availability, and other office responsibilities will make it difficult to complete the process within a 2-day window. MAEO respectfully requests an extension to a 5-business day window to address these challenges.

MAEO would like to bring to your attention that the bill calls for the publication of election results by precinct. This was implemented in 2022 and presented a significant challenge due to the high number of ballot styles, including multi-page ballots, made available for early voting in some areas. Managing this volume of ballot styles comes at a cost and puts additional pressure on election judges to distribute the correct ballot to each voter. Some counties may also face the challenge of relocating early voting sites due to limited space in the centers to accommodate the necessary ballots for the Presidential election cycle.

We are hopeful that this committee will support this bill and consider our amendment request. Thank you for your time. If you have any questions, please contact me at (410)386-2958 or Katherine.berry@maryland.gov.