

EDUCATION, ENERGY, AND ENVIROMENT COMMITTEE

February 15, 2023

SB 379– Election Law - Ballots - Processing and Reporting Procedures

Position: SUPPORT

Disability Rights Maryland (DRM – formerly Maryland Disability Law Center) is the Protection & Advocacy agency in Maryland, mandated to advance the civil rights of people with disabilities. DRM works to increase opportunities for Marylanders with disabilities to be part of their communities through voting by advocating for equal and equitable access to the ballot.

Disability Rights Maryland (DRM) supports SB 379 which will allow for the early preprocessing of absentee ballots, ensuring timely election results. During the pandemic, emergency measures were put in place to accommodate the influx of absentee ballots as most voters chose to vote by mail. The emergency measures allowed election officials to begin pre-processing absentee ballots earlier than usual, so as not to overwhelm officials and ensure results would be announced in a timely manner. This proved helpful, as the past two elections have been just as secure and timely, just as they were prior to the pandemic.

Although the state of emergency is over, policies and practices that were implemented during the pandemic are still needed today. Since the 2020 election, a many voters still choose to vote by mail. In the 2022 General Election, almost 30% of voters cast their ballot by mail, and nearly 500,000 voters opted to be on the permanent vote by mail list. Clearly, voting by mail continues to be a popular option for voters. Currently, as absentee ballots flood our local boards of elections, officials are not allowed to begin opening absentee ballots until the Wednesday following Election Day. This was feasible when absentee ballots accounted for 5-6% of all ballots in elections prior to the pandemic. However, as voting by mail becomes increasingly popular, it is important to account for the time it will take election officials to process these ballots and tabulate the votes. Doing so after Election Day will be too late. As such, we should give election officials the opportunity to begin preprocessing absentee ballots to ensure they will not be overwhelmed on election day and can provide accurate and timely election results.



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This bill will also allow voters to cure their absentee ballots should they forget a signature on their ballot envelope. This is particularly important for voters with disabilities as this bill will allow them to provide a signature and communicate with the State Board of Elections in an accessible manner. Allowing for ballots to be cured provides voters with confidence that their ballot will be counted as they correct their mistake. SB 379 is in the best interest of voters, our efficient election officials and promotes secure elections. As such, we urge a favorable vote on SB 379. Please feel free to contact us at SamuelaA@DisabilityRightsMD.Org or 443-692-2512