

April 1, 2024

Re: Election Law Curbside Voting Bill (HB0641)

Chair, V. Chair, and Members of the Senate Education, Energy and Environment Committee:

My name is Monica Wiley, and I respectfully ask for your vehement support of HB 0641-Election Law-Curbside Voting Establishment bill. This bill is very personal. As a voter with a physical disability (I have an incomplete spinal cord injury caused by a drunk driver tractor trailer accident that killed my entire family at the age of nine. As a result—I walk with a cane.) I've experienced immense challenges and barriers to voting due architectural and attitudinal barriers. In this past Election cycle—I encountered significant voting challenges. I had to walk a great distance to the location; the line was too long for me to stand, so an Election Officer stood in my place until it was time for me to vote. As a proud confident woman and voter who takes pride in her independence, not only was I embarrassed—but I felt very inadequate as a voter, and it was incredibly taxing on my body physically where my body felt very stressed and exhausted.

As a former resident of Virginia who is now a proud resident of Maryland, voters with disabilities including myself feel very disenfranchised and marginalized due to the lack of accessibility and accommodations to the voting ballot. Not only is it inhumane—it is unacceptable! Currently, 29 states including Virginia and Washington DC have adopted Curbside Voting for individuals with disabilities. Our community is vast and varied and require accommodations like our neighbors, peers and other voting members of society. Full access to voter participation should be available and convenient without experiencing undue stress and pressure to one's respective disability. My community should able vote in person comfortably with the same dignity, rights and fairness like other members of society. I'm a hard-working professional who has built her career on equity, inclusion and belonging for my community.

Voting is the bedrock of our democracy. It is the freedom, ability and independence to exercise our voice through voting without challenges and barriers. Proper access and accommodations to the voting process is critical and vital to advancing the fairness, parity and rights of people with disabilities. Having full access to the voting ballot adds value to our autonomy, our voice, our freedom and ability to participate in voting and our right to exercise the 15th amendment-voting rights and voting access for all.

In close—I like to end with a quote by Martin Luther King Jr., “the time is always right to do what is right”. That being said, let's pass HB0641. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Monica Wiley-Maryland Statewide Independent Living Council Member