

2024-02-20 IRGA Written Testimony in Support of MD

Uploaded by: Alexander Tischenko

Position: FAV

Institute *for* Responsive Government Action

The Institute for Responsive Government Action respectfully submits the following testimony in support of SB 605:

It's time to upgrade Maryland's automatic voter registration (AVR) system.

An upgraded AVR system - like those adopted in **Colorado, Oregon, Alaska, Nevada, Massachusetts, Delaware, Minnesota, New Mexico, Michigan, Washington State, and the District of Columbia** - is the most efficient and secure system for registering eligible voters and updating current voters' registrations.

The Institute for Responsive Government Action is proud to submit a letter on behalf of the **Everyone Votes Maryland Coalition and eleven other leading civic and community organizations across the state supporting SB 605**. (See Attachment A)

We thank Senator Washington for her strong leadership on this issue.

This bill will accomplish three important goals:

- First, SB 605 will get **more eligible, unregistered Marylanders registered to vote** than the current, partial AVR system - and will do so only **after carefully verifying their eligibility**.
- Second, SB 605 will be more effective at **keeping current voters' information up to date, ensuring cleaner, more accurate voter rolls**.
- Third, SB 605 will **increase safeguards against non-citizen registration, ensuring the integrity of the voter rolls** while **protecting noncitizens**.

SB 605 accomplishes these goals for a modest upfront investment, with significant short, medium, and long term **savings for MVA, SBE, and local elections officials**.

The Upgraded AVR system in SB 605 works by **identifying clearly eligible voters using information and documents they already provide**, and then **streamlining the process for those voters**. It allows **citizens to make decisions about voter registration from the**

comfort of their homes, rather than in the middle of a busy, potentially stressful transaction with the MVA or MHBE.

Upgraded AVR will work seamlessly with Maryland’s current closed primary system, just as it has in other closed primary states (like Oregon, Nevada, Delaware, and New Mexico). **SB 605 provides more ways for voters to affiliate with a party than the current AVR system.**

SB 605 will improve voter access, voter integrity, and government efficiency. It’s a policy that has been passed with **bipartisan support in other states**, and has been implemented by state and local election officials of both major parties.

To quote one bipartisan pair of Colorado local election officials, **“From beginning to end the entire process is safe, secure, and efficient - and it registers more voters.”**¹

With this bill, the Maryland General Assembly has the opportunity to engage more voters to actively participate in the democratic process.

Please see below for additional supporting analysis of the above testimony.

Thank you for your consideration,

Alex Tischenko
Senior Policy Advisor
Institute for Responsive Government Action

The Institute for Responsive Government Action is dedicated to ensuring state and federal governments work effectively for the very people they serve. Responsive Gov Action works to provide legislative advice and action, polling, and testimony in order to find practical policy solutions that make government systems more efficient, accessible, and responsive for everyday Americans.

¹ Pam Anderson and Molly Fitzpartrick, [Opinion: Colorado’s voter-registration system is a model of accessibility for the country](#), The Colorado Sun (Oct 13, 2021).

First, SB 605 will get more eligible, unregistered Marylanders registered to vote than the current, partial AVR system - and will do so only after carefully verifying their eligibility.

- There are about 650,000 Marylanders who are eligible, unregistered US citizens.
- Less than half of unregistered MVA customers decide to register to vote through the current AVR system.
- Almost no customers use the current AVR system at the Health Benefit Exchange: HBE data shows that 97-98% of Health Benefit Exchange transactions do not result in a voter registration application.
- Before 2020, Colorado and Maryland had a very similar AVR system. When Colorado switched to Upgraded AVR in 2020, they doubled the registration rate for unregistered MVA customers. The increase was more than double for young people.²
- Every one of those newly registered voters under the Upgraded AVR system in Colorado presented the Colorado MVA a document proving their US Citizenship.

Second, SB 605 will be more effective at keeping current voters' information up to date, ensuring cleaner, more accurate voter rolls.

- Marylanders are highly mobile: about 8% of the population moves within the state every year; Marylanders of color, renters, and lower income residents move even more often.
- Residential mobility leads to out of date voter registration addresses.
- Unfortunately, 30-40% of registered Maryland voters are not updating their registration address at MVA. Prior to switching to Upgraded AVR, Colorado's MVA experienced similar results.

² [New Research from Stanford Political Scientists Shows Dramatic Increases in Voter Registrations and Updates Caused by Reforms to Colorado's Motor Voter Procedures - Institute for Responsive Government](#)

- By upgrading their AVR system, the Colorado MVA processed over 200,000 additional voter registration address updates per year.³

Third, SB 605 will increase safeguards against non-citizen registration, ensuring the integrity of the voter rolls while helping protect noncitizens.

- Under current MVA procedures, customers applying for Non-Compliant Drivers' Licenses (which can be issued to people without proof of lawful presence) are not asked about voter registration. This practice would continue under upgraded AVR.
- However, non-citizens applying for REAL ID are asked about voter registration, even after they've presented a document (like a Green Card) demonstrating that they are not a US Citizen.
- Upgraded AVR screens these confirmed non-citizens out of any voter registration questions or voter registration transactions.
- By doing so, the system protects them from making an inadvertent mistake with severe immigration consequences for them and their families.
- It does so without requiring the collection or storage of any new documentation or information; rather, it utilizes information and documents already provided by customers.

SB 605 accomplishes these goals for a modest upfront investment, with significant short, medium, and long term savings for MVA, SBE, and local elections officials.

- Maryland is better positioned than any other state to make the transition from partial AVR to Upgraded AVR.
 - No new systems or database connections are necessary between the MVA and SBE; rather, implementing Upgraded AVR simply requires making changes to existing procedures and IT workflows.
- By processing more registrations through the MVA and MHBE, the upgraded system replaces hundreds of thousands of costly paper registration forms that voters would otherwise mail or file in person with local elections officials.

³ *Id.*

- Accurate and updated registrations also reduce undeliverable election mail, list maintenance mailers, provisional ballots, and same day registrations.
- By distributing voter registrations and registration updates evenly throughout the year, Upgraded AVR significantly reduces the crush of voter registration forms filed late in the election season - reducing the number of temp staffers needed at local elections offices.
- Upgraded AVR significantly reduces the number of MVA customers who require in-person voter registration services during MVA transactions.
 - Colorado's MVA saw about a 1-minute and 30-second time savings per transaction as a result of the streamlined process.
 - Reductions in transaction times means cost savings, shorter lines, and higher customer satisfaction.

The Upgraded AVR system in SB 605 works by identifying clearly eligible voters using information and documents they already provide, and then streamlining the process for those voters. It allows citizens to make decisions about voter registration from the comfort of their homes, rather than in the middle of a busy, potentially stressful transaction with the MVA or MHBE.

- Under the current AVR system, MVA and MHBE customers are interrupted in the middle of their transaction, and are asked a series of questions about voter registration.
- Unsurprisingly, many MVA and MHBE customers turn down this opportunity to register to vote or update their registration:
 - They are in a rush to finish their already lengthy transaction
 - They incorrectly believe that they're already registered
 - They don't understand that they need to update their address when they move - in other words, they hear "voter registration", think "I am registered!" and don't pursue it further

- Some may be unsure of their eligibility (such as returning citizens) or are unfamiliar with the process (such as young, first time registrants)
- Under Upgraded AVR, the system uses the documents that customers already provide to the MVA to identify citizens who are clearly eligible to register to vote.
 - For example, when an MVA customer provides a document that proves their US citizenship (like a passport, US birth certificate, or certificate of naturalization) and completes a licensing application, the MVA has collected all the information necessary to confirm the voter's eligibility to register to vote.
- Rather than interrupt their licensing transaction to ask a series of voter registration questions, the system forwards their information to election officials.
- Election officials follow up with the customer through a mailed notice that provides information about voter registration, and also offers them an opportunity to decline to register to vote.
 - If they don't decline within three weeks of the mailing of the notice, they are added to the voter rolls.
- A similar streamlined process applies to already registered voters who have moved or changed their name.
 - Rather than interrupt their licensing transaction to ask a series of questions about updating their voter registration address, the system forwards their information to election officials.
 - Election officials follow up with the customer through a mailed notice that informs them that their registration has been updated, and also offers them an opportunity to correct the update if necessary.
- A very similar procedure would apply to applicants for Medicaid and health exchange plans at the MHBE.

- MHBE already verifies applicants' citizenship through an automated federal database check.
- Applicants whose citizenship is verified through this database check would be provided with the same streamlined procedure as MVA - they would receive a mailed notice about voter registration or updating their registration.
- Upgraded AVR at MHBE will be particularly effective at keeping voter rolls clean and up to date, because MHBE applicants typically renew their coverage every year.

Upgraded AVR will work seamlessly with Maryland's current closed primary system, just as it has in other states (like Oregon, Nevada, Delaware, and New Mexico). SB 605 provides more ways for voters to affiliate with a party than the current AVR system.

- Party affiliation is not an issue for the vast majority of users of upgraded AVR: most MVA customers are registered voters who have already affiliated with a party (or who have already chosen not to affiliate)
- Under Upgraded AVR, newly registered voters have three different options to affiliate with a party when they register to vote, and two different options to affiliate with a party when they're getting ready to vote.
- Voters newly registered through Upgraded AVR can affiliate with a party:
 - During the MVA transaction itself
 - (New!) By returning the upgraded AVR mailed notice, postage prepaid
 - By visiting an online portal (which the upgraded AVR mailed notice specifically references)
 - When applying for a mail ballot
 - (New!) When they show up at the polling place on election day or during early voting
- However, the election day party affiliation option is limited; this does not change our closed primary structure.
 - It only applies if:

- The voter is registered for the first time through Upgraded AVR
 - AND
 - The voter does not affiliate with a party before showing up to vote
- If these two criteria are met, the voter gets the same party affiliation opportunity that a same-day registrant currently gets.

Attachment A:

Institute *for* Responsive Government Action

To The Maryland Legislature:

On behalf of the undersigned state-wide and national organizations, we are writing to urge you to support SB 605/HB 1088, a bill that would upgrade Maryland's partial automatic voter registration system to secure automatic voter registration — the gold standard of voter registration systems, adopted by over ten states, including leaders in electoral participation like Colorado, Oregon, and Minnesota, to name a few.

Over the past few years, the importance of strengthening and protecting our democracy has become more evident than ever before in our nation's history. Democracy works best when every eligible Maryland resident can exercise their freedom to vote in an efficient, secure, and inclusive process regardless of background, geography, or demographics. Upgraded automatic voter registration helps streamline that process and ensures the electorate is reflective of our communities.

This year, legislators and elected officials in Maryland have the opportunity to adopt the most efficient and secure system for registering eligible voters and updating current voters' registrations at government agencies.

In addition to being the most efficient and secure automatic voter registration system, upgraded automatic voter registration would reduce costs for state agencies and elections officials and protect the freedom to vote for historically marginalized communities.

Our democracy cannot wait. The people of Maryland deserve a democracy that works for them, not against them.

Sincerely,

The Institute for Responsive Government Action
Everyone Votes Maryland Coalition
Common Cause MD
Baltimore Votes
Black Girls Vote MD
Maryland NAACP
League of Women Voters MD
Get Money Out MD
ADL Washington D.C.
AFSCME 3
Maryland PIRG
Planned Parenthood MD
Indivisible Howard County Defend Democracy Team

GMOM_SB605_022124.pdf

Uploaded by: Charlie Cooper

Position: FAV



Get Money Out – Maryland

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**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SENATE BILL 605- ELECTION LAW –
AUTOMATIC VOTER REGISTRATION - ALTERATIONS–**

February 21, 2024

By Charlie Cooper, President

Get Money Out–Maryland is an all-volunteer force seeking to get big money out of our political system and make elections fairer. Ten thousand Marylanders have actively supported our work. We believe that every citizen should have equal access to the ballot as a voter or as a candidate. We also work to regulate the role of big money in our elections and to reduce the disproportionate influence of concentrated wealth on our political system.

This bill is patterned on systems that are already implemented with remarkable success in states of all “colors” from Alaska to Massachusetts. It registers more new voters and keeps addresses more accurate on the voter rolls than Maryland’s current system. As written, it would apply to the Motor Vehicle Administration and the Maryland Health Benefit Exchange, but it is easily adaptable to other agencies such as the Department of Corrections and Public Safety. The truly automatic registration gets more citizens engaged as registered voters, but it is still easy to opt out for those who desire. It takes the stress out of the voter registration process.

We strongly urge the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee to issue a favorable report for SB 605.

SB605_FAV_AFSCME.pdf

Uploaded by: Cindy Smalls

Position: FAV



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Patrick Moran – President

**Election Law-Automatic Voter Registration-Alterations
Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee**

February 21, 2024

AFSCME supports SB 605, and we ask the committee for a favorable report for the bill which alters automatic voter registration laws in Maryland.

Automatic Voter Registration has emerged as a key tool in expanding the accessibility and inclusivity of the electoral process. By automatically registering eligible citizens to vote when they interact with government agencies, AVR removes significant barriers to participation and ensures a more representative democracy. While Maryland has already implemented AVR, there is room for improvement and expansion to maximize its impact on voter turnout and engagement.

To upgrade the AVR system in Maryland, several steps can be taken. Firstly, it is crucial to streamline updates for registered voters. Driver license applicants who are already registered to vote and who provide a new address during their MVA transaction automatically have their information sent to elections officials as an address update. After receiving and processing the information from the MVA, election officials mail the applicant a notice informing them of the address update and providing an opportunity to correct the address update if necessary. A similar streamlined procedure would apply to applicants for Medicaid and health exchange plans, whose citizenship and eligibility the agency already confirms through existing processes.

The benefit of making these changes and others as suggested in the bill to the AVR system allows Maryland to register more eligible voters, especially those who have been left out by traditional methods. These upgrades also give us more complete, secure, and accurate registration records. It also promotes election integrity and can save election administration costs. By processing more registrations through the MVA, the upgraded system replaces paper registration forms that voters would otherwise mail or file in person. It also speeds up the MVA transaction, which reduces lines and wait times which is a benefit to our members at state agencies.

In conclusion, upgrading automatic voter registration in Maryland is a crucial step toward strengthening democracy and ensuring that all eligible citizens have the opportunity to participate in the electoral process. Maryland can enhance the impact and effectiveness of Automatic Voter Registration, ultimately fostering a more inclusive and representative democracy.

For these reasons, we ask for a favorable report on SB605.

SB 605 - Election Law - Automatic Voter Registrati

Uploaded by: Donna Edwards

Position: FAV



MARYLAND STATE & D.C. AFL-CIO

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President

Donna S. Edwards

Secretary-Treasurer

Gerald W. Jackson

**SB 605 - Election Law - Automatic Voter Registration - Alterations
Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
February 21, 2024**

SUPPORT

**Donna S. Edwards
President**

Maryland State and DC AFL-CIO

Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of SB 605. My name is Donna S. Edwards, and I am the President of the Maryland State and DC AFL-CIO. On behalf of the 300,000 union members in the state of Maryland, I offer the following comments.

SB 605 changes Maryland's automatic voter registration (AVR) system through the Motor Vehicle Administration to require opt-outs to not be registered, instead of the current opt-in standard. Proposals like this, known as upgraded automatic voter registration, were adopted in Colorado, Oregon, Alaska, Nevada, Massachusetts, Delaware, Minnesota, New Mexico, Michigan, and Washington. Upgraded AVR requires agencies like the Motor Vehicle Administration to automatically send newly updated residency information to election officials, unless the applicant opts out, any time they provide new information to the MVA with an accompanying proof of citizenship. These same AVR processes would apply to applicants for state benefits like Medicaid or using plans on the Maryland Health Exchange.

SB 605 would lead to higher voter registration rates, in-person time and cost savings for the MVA through streamlined registration procedures, and more up to date voter rolls. We urge a favorable report on SB 605.

Appendix 1 - National AFL-CIO Position on Voting Rights

Voting Rights Should Be Expanded

The U.S. government needs to expand voting opportunities in America and support universal voter registration—not erect new hurdles, like strict voter ID laws.

We support legislative and administrative reforms at the federal, state and local levels to expand voter registration and greater access to voting, including expanded early voting, no-excuse absentee voting, same day registration and voter registration modernization. We also think voting rights should be restored to individuals who have committed crimes but served their time.

According to the Brennan Center for Justice, the Voting Rights Act was passed in 1965 to ensure state and local governments do not pass laws or policies that deny American citizens the equal right to vote based on race. As one of the world's leading democracies, the United States should work to keep voting free, fair and accessible. That's why the Voting Rights Act is so important. It makes sure every citizen, regardless of race, has an equal opportunity to participate in our great democracy.

On June 25, 2013, the U.S. Supreme Court invalidated Section 4, a key provision of the Voting Rights Act, thereby removing a critical tool to combat racial discrimination in voting. Under Section 5 of the act, jurisdictions with a history of discrimination must seek pre-approval of changes in voting rules. This process, known as “preclearance,” helps to block discrimination before it occurs. In *Shelby County v. Holder*, the court found that the formula in Section 4—which determines the states and localities covered by Section 5—was unconstitutional, meaning the formula could no longer be used as a basis for subjecting jurisdictions to preclearance. The court claimed that a more current coverage formula was needed.

This is a giant step backward and Congress needs to take up legislation to fully restore the Voting Rights Act and ensure all who want to vote, can vote.

Appendix 2 - 2017 National AFL-CIO Convention Resolution 14

Voting Rights: Building An Inclusive Pro-Voter Democracy to Move A Winning Agenda for Working People - October 24, 2017

The labor movement believes that ensuring and protecting the right of every citizen to vote is a bedrock principle of our democracy. One major way we advocate for ourselves to great affect is through the ballot box—by electing and protecting champions of working people and winning policy fights that matter to all workers. However, our democracy suffers from deliberate voter suppression and disenfranchisement that severely limits the labor movement and other progressive movements' ability to move a winning agenda for working men, women, their families and their communities that we serve.

We see the common threads among the continued erosion of rights for working families, the attack on an economy that works for everyone, and the assault on one of our most fundamental democratic rights—the right to vote. The right to vote, fair representation and access to democracy are key in moving a winning agenda for all people and ensuring that not one community continues to suffer needlessly. Moreover, a number of states have reversed efforts to make it easier for citizens to vote by mail or vote early. Some have rescinded same-day voter registration and provisional ballots. Others have reduced the number of polling places and caused long delays in of-color and low-income

neighborhoods. These are some of the same states that have waged a full attack on the labor movement.

We believe that voting in elections should be as convenient, fair and secure as possible. Yet some citizens face voter suppression tactics such as limits to early voting, fewer polling locations and voting machines, long lines, and intimidation at polling stations. Three states that currently hold elections entirely by mail, Colorado, Oregon and Washington, have significantly higher voter participation during elections. Vote by mail is efficient and cost effective, and creates a verifiable paper trail. Studies have shown that voting by mail does not give an advantage to any political party, and support for vote by mail includes all demographic groups, geographic areas and political affiliation. This is one of many pro-voter reforms that we know works to deliver a democracy that is inclusive.

America's hardworking families and communities deserve full access to the ballot box. As a movement of working people we demand that a pro-voter agenda be adopted immediately, starting with the restoration and expansion of the Voting Rights Act and passage of legislation that expands opportunities for citizens to vote. We join with hundreds of other civic organizations across the political spectrum in calling for real integrity in our democracy, and urge our leaders to expand and protect the right to vote.

WHEREAS, labor union members must be engaged as voters, activists, volunteers and stakeholders. Our unique infrastructure, which is in place in 50 states, allows us to catalyze organizing, mobilizing and resourcing the work to build an inclusive democracy with and through our affiliates, constituency groups and national strategic partners.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the AFL-CIO shall stand firm with the principles of an inclusive democracy through:

Prioritizing a pro-voter platform within our fight forward to reclaim the economic narrative that speaks for working families, as well as an opportunity to build an independent political movement that aligns with our shared values;

Advocating to expand and protect voting rights at the federal and state level, including the full restoration of the federal Voting Rights Act; ensuring the modernization of voting through automatic registration, online registration and same-day registration; making it easier for working people to vote by expanding early voting, permanent mail ballot and vote by mail through legislation and ballot initiatives at the local, state and federal levels; restoring the rights of returning citizens; and maintaining and expanding the availability of straight-ticket voting and a host of other voter protections that happen prior to elections;

Fighting to protect the voting rights of working people and all people of color when they come under attack, especially against attempts to suppress votes in the lead-up to elections, including through support for community-focused voter education and voter protection efforts;

Preventing corporations and the wealthy few from buying elections;

Changing structural rules to ensure that every vote and every voice counts equally; and

Reshaping the political debate to demand full democracy at every level of government.

The institutions of our government need to function on behalf of the people, regardless of whom has power—it is bigger than parties, politics or profits.

**Appendix 3 - “The Labor Movement Is Ready to Ensure that Voting Rights Are Fully Restored”
By Fred Redmond, Secretary Treasurer, AFL-CIO - June 16, 2023**

The right to vote is the cornerstone of democracy and was at the heart of the civil rights movement.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., John Lewis and other civil rights leaders and allies—including the labor movement—called attention to the pervasive and pernicious tools used to disenfranchise Black voters in the South. Work that led to the enactment of the Voting Rights Act (VRA) in 1965, which put an end to the physical intimidation, harassment, poll taxes and literacy tests Black voters were subjected to just to exercise our right to vote.

But the VRA has been chipped away ever since it became law. A number of states have made it more difficult to vote through restrictive photo identification requirements, and by rescinding same-day voter registration, provisional ballots and early voting periods.

Other states have reduced the number of polling places—often in communities of color where voters have to endure the long lines and extra steps meant to dissuade us from casting a ballot.

And some states have redrawn congressional districts in an attempt to dilute the power of certain racial demographic groups.

Racial gerrymandering is prohibited by the VRA, and was at the heart of a case taken up by the Supreme Court last week. In *Allen v. Milligan*, the high court ruled Alabama violated the Voting Rights Act when it drew its congressional map following the 2020 census.

It was a surprising decision by this Supreme Court, given this bench’s track record and conservative ideological leanings, but it shouldn’t have been—not for a country that values democracy and the democratic process.

And, unfortunately, this decision does nothing to repair the one it made a decade ago that ripped a gaping hole in the VRA and empowered extremist lawmakers to restrict access to the ballot box.

Shelby County v. Holder was a wake-up call—that we must always be vigilant to protect our freedoms and rights, and that political extremists will go to terrific lengths for power and personal gain, even if that means jeopardizing our democracy.

It also was a wake-up call for the labor movement to re-engage and tighten our relationship with civil and voting rights coalitions.

The labor movement has a long history of supporting civil and voting rights and the Voting Rights Act. We educate union members about the importance of voting rights. We mobilize union members in support of positive voting rights reforms. We advocate, along with our allies at the state and federal levels, for improvements to our voting laws. And we fight discriminatory voter ID legislation and other voter suppression laws that restrict the right to vote.

And we will continue to do so.

When President Liz Shuler and I were elected to lead the AFL-CIO a year ago, we pledged to ensure racial and social justice is in everything we do—in all of our programmatic work and at every level of the federation. We are committed to advancing racial justice in our outreach and programs, and to opening pathways for young people and people of color to enter leadership positions. We are committed to vanquishing oppression in all its forms.

That includes fighting state legislatures that try to prevent people of color, women, young adults, LGBTQ+ people and other marginalized people from exercising their right to take part in our electoral process.

And we will continue to push Congress to do its job and pass the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act to fully restore and permanently protect voting rights, and ensure access to free and fair elections.

TESTIMONY FOR SB605- Google Docs - Google Docs.pdf

Uploaded by: Marijane Mnck

Position: FAV



TESTIMONY FOR SB605

ELECTION LAW – AUTOMATIC VOTER REGISTRATION – ALTERATIONS

Bill Sponsor: Senator M. Washington

Committee: Education, Energy, and the Environment

Organization Submitting: Indivisible Howard County

Person Submitting: Marijane Monck - Co-Facilitator Defend Democracy Team

Position: FAVORABLE

I am submitting testimony in favor of Senate Bill 0605 on behalf of Indivisible Howard County. Indivisible Howard County is a 700+ member organization comprising numerous action teams. The Defend Democracy Team works on issues involving campaign finance and election integrity.

Maryland should upgrade its automatic voter registration (AVR) system. An upgraded AVR system is the most efficient and secure system for registering eligible voters and updating current voters' registrations. The current system registers fewer voters than it could.

This legislation would streamline MVA registration for unregistered and confirmed citizens. In addition, Upgraded AVR is compatible with both lowering the pre-registration age to 15 and to expanding voter registration in the Department of Corrections.

Oregon Elections AVR Testimony MD - Molly Woon.pdf

Uploaded by: Molly Woon

Position: FAV

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF STATE

LAVONNE GRIFFIN-VALADE
SECRETARY OF STATE
CHERYL MYERS
DEPUTY SECRETARY OF STATE



ELECTIONS DIVISION

MOLLY WOON
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(503) 986-1518

February 21, 2024

Chair Feldman, Vice-Chair Kagan, and members of the committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide information to the committee about Oregon's experience with Upgraded Voter Registration.

I serve as the Elections Director for Oregon Secretary of State LaVonne Griffin-Valade. I am responsible for the administration of Oregon's elections system by working closely with state agencies, 36 counties throughout Oregon, and the division's dedicated staff.

Upgraded Automatic Voter Registration, or what we in Oregon call "Oregon Motor Voter," has modernized voter registration in our state by providing a secure, simple, and convenient way for more Oregonians to become registered voters.

We passed Oregon Motor Voter legislation almost a decade ago, and the law went into effect in 2016, making us the first state in the nation to implement this policy. Since that time, it's been successfully administered by Secretaries of State of both major political parties.

Under the old system, most Oregonians needed to take a separate step to register to vote at the DMV after obtaining or renewing their driver license. Oregon Motor Voter eliminated the need to fill out the voter registration card for those with qualifying interactions at the DMV.

Instead, eligible Oregonians receive a mailing from the Oregon Elections Division explaining their options for registering to vote.

Importantly, only a person with a record of providing documentation to DMV establishing that the person is a U.S. Citizen has their information sent to be registered through the Oregon Motor Voter process.

The results are impressive: Over 95% of eligible but unregistered customers at our DMV successfully registered to vote.¹

What's more, Oregonians have appreciated the simplicity and convenience of the process.

¹ 2018 Oregon Motor Voter Registrations by County. Elections Division, Oregon Secretary of State.

We believe that our investment in Oregon Motor Voter and other innovative policies are key reasons that, in 2022, Oregon ranked #1 in the nation for voter turnout, according to the US Elections Project at the University of Florida.² It's our first #1 ranking.

This means that over 61% of Oregon's eligible citizens voted in the 2022 midterm election. By contrast, in 2014, just before we implemented Oregon Motor Voter, our turnout rate of eligible citizens was just 53%.³ We've come a long way in 10 years.

But we believe that we can do even better. That's why, in our last legislative session, we passed a bill applying our Oregon Motor Voter process to Medicaid. Medicaid's existing citizenship verification process, experience with data sharing, and the fact that it reaches populations that might otherwise be hard to engage makes it an ideal program for automatic voter registration.

Our initial research showed that approximately 85% of the remaining eligible but unregistered Oregonians within the state could be reached through AVR at Medicaid.⁴

We are working with our colleagues in Colorado, New Mexico, and other states that have enacted the same policy to get necessary guidance and approval from the federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services.

Applying this successful policy to Medicaid is the next logical step toward the goal of expanding access and ensuring clean and up to date voter rolls.

I hope this information helps inform your deliberations regarding legislation pending before the committee.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "M F Woon". The letters are cursive and somewhat stylized.

Molly Woon
Director of Elections

² <https://election.lab.ufl.edu/voter-turnout/2022-general-election-turnout/>

³ <https://election.lab.ufl.edu/2014-general-election-turnout-rates/>

⁴ Office of the Secretary of State. Oregon State Legislature Testimony. Provided on February 10, 2023. <https://olis.oregonlegislature.gov/liz/2023R1/Downloads/PublicTestimonyDocument/47680>

SB 605 -Election Law – Automatic Voter Registratio

Uploaded by: Morgan Drayton

Position: FAV

**February 21, 2024**

**Testimony on SB 605
Election Law – Automatic Voter Registration - Alterations
Education, Energy, and the Environment**

Position: Favorable

Common Cause Maryland and the Maryland League of Conservation Voters are in support of SB 605, which would upgrade our state’s voter registration system and help more eligible voters engage with our political system.

Marylanders already submit applications and supporting documents to an agency such as the MVA when they apply for a driver’s license. An upgraded “back-end” AVR system would identify when these materials clearly demonstrate that the customer is eligible to register to voter and/or update their current voter registration. The customer’s information is then automatically sent to election officials who follow up with a mailed notice about voter registration (including an option to decline to register altogether).

This new system of automatic voter registration will bring new voters from diverse communities into the political process - current MVA data indicates 30-40% of registered MD voters are not updating their voter registration address with the MVA, and less than half of unregistered MVA customers register to vote at the MVA - when other states (CO, OR, AK, NV, MA, DE) upgraded to SAVR (secure automatic voter registration), they doubled the rate of new registrations at their MVA, and more than doubled the rate for the youngest voters.

The bill also has provisions that ensure protection for non-citizen Marylanders by screening confirmed non-citizens out of voter registration questions, protecting them from making an inadvertent mistake with severe immigration consequences.

Voting is the most essential form of political expression, and the right to do so is fundamental to maintaining an open democracy. SB 605 represents a small step forward in the fight to make voting easily accessible for all eligible Marylanders.

For these reasons, we request a favorable report.

PPM--SB 605--FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Rahula Strohl

Position: FAV

Planned Parenthood of Maryland

Committee: Education, Energy and the Environment Committee

Bill number: SB 605 - Election Law - Automatic Voter Registration - Alterations

Hearing Date: February 21, 2024

Position: Support

Planned Parenthood of Maryland (PPM) strongly supports *SB 605 - Election Law - Automatic Voter Registration - Alterations*. This bill establishes the most efficient and secure system for registering eligible voters and updating current voters' registrations, based on successful efforts

Research has proven that Maryland's current system misses out on potential registered voters. Requiring voters to take an affirmative, seemingly unrelated step while completing an errand such as engaging with the Maryland Motor Vehicle Administration (MVA) or the Maryland Health Benefit Exchange (MHBE).

Since at least the summer of 2016, PPM's outreach and education programs have participated in voter registration. Between partnering with organizations like Black Girls Vote, registering patients in and outside our waiting rooms, and going door to door in the communities we serve, PPM employees and volunteers have extensive experience engaging with Marylanders who aren't registered or don't have updated registration.

The most poignant of these interactions are people who had given up on the idea of registering to vote because of previous convictions—in some cases, decades-old convictions. Despite Maryland's restoration of civil rights to returning citizens, many people still don't know they are eligible. Having the state be responsible for determining eligibility of voters, as this bill provides for, will increase registrations for returning citizens regardless of their awareness of their rights.

PPM patients, volunteers and the members of the communities we serve all benefit from easier participation in the democratic process. For the foregoing reasons, we ask for a favorable report for SB 605. If we can provide any further information, please contact Erin Bradley at Erin.Bradley@ppm.care or (443) 604-3544.

SB605_MDSierraClub_fav_EEE - 21Feb2024.pdf

Uploaded by: Richard Norling

Position: FAV



P.O. Box 278
Riverdale, MD 20738

Committee: Education, Energy, and the Environment
Testimony on: SB 605 Election Law – Automatic Voter Registration - Alterations
Position: Favorable
Hearing Date: February 21, 2024

The Maryland Chapter of the Sierra Club urges a favorable report on SB 605. The bill will make voter registration transactions more automatic and seamless. When an agency like the Motor Vehicle Administration already has evidence of an individual’s eligibility to vote or change of address, the agency will just send the information electronically to the State Board of Elections instead of taking extra time to ask the individual whether they want to register or update their registration. The voter will then receive a confirmation notice in the mail.

The Sierra Club and its members advocate on behalf of both the natural and human environments, including promoting racial and social equity. As a grassroots organization, we believe that voting should be as accessible and convenient as possible for all individuals who are eligible to vote. By making the voter registration process truly automatic, this bill will save time for both individual registrants and agency personnel.

Several government agencies in Maryland offer individuals who interact with them an opportunity to register to vote or to update their voter registration. The agencies are the Motor Vehicle Administration (MVA), Maryland Health Benefit Exchange (MHBE), local departments of social services, and the Mobility Certification Office (MCO) in the Maryland Transit Administration.

Since it began implementing RealID, the MVA has definitive evidence that many of the individuals it interacts with are citizens who live in Maryland and are old enough to register to vote. Since the agency already has this information, there should be no need for further conversation or paperwork before registering that individual to vote.

Ten states have adopted this method of automatic voter registration. Studies in Colorado¹ and Oregon show that this method of automatic voter registration has resulted in increases in voter registration and voting. The bill will result in more complete and accurate voter registration lists and will save time and cost for both individuals and state agencies.

For those reasons, we urge a favorable report on SB 605.

Rich Norling
Chair, Voting Rights Committee
Rich.Norling@MDSierra.org

Josh Tulkin
Chapter Director
Josh.Tulkin@MDSierra.org

¹ Justin Grimmer and Jonathan Rodden, “Changing the Default: The Impact of Motor-Voter Reform in Colorado”, Stanford University Dept. of Political Science, 2022 ([full report](#)) ([summary](#))

2024 SB0605 Testimony against 2024-02-21.pdf

Uploaded by: Alan Lang

Position: UNF

Testimony Against SB0605

Please vote against SB0605.

This is a complicated 16-page bill describing the process for automatic voter registration via the MVA or the Maryland Health Benefit Exchange. Section 3-203.1 (G)(3)(I) and (2) on page 10 states, that an exchange applicant can register to vote if, "the applicant's attestation of citizenship IS NOT RELIABLY VERIFIED through an electronic database match; and the applicant HAS NOT ATTESTED that the applicant IS NOT A United States Citizen.

Additionally, if the Exchange customer provides information such as name or address that differs from the alleged match on the voter rolls, the Exchange system will issue a notice of update via nonforwardable mail to the address of the customer. If the customer does nothing with the notice within 21 days after the notice was issued, the voting record will be updated. A negative assurance process such as this is can lead to errors in the voting rolls. Any changes to name and address should be positively confirmed!!!

A notice should also be sent to the name and address of the current voter in addition to the Exchange customer to confirm that they did request the name or address change (pages 10-11). The MVA process is different and could be flawed as well. Depending on situations, an inactive voter can be changed to an active voter based on a negative assurance process. It is difficult to follow.

Please vote against HB0471.

Alan Lang
242 Armstrong Lane
Pasadena, MD 21122
410-336-9745
Alanlang1@verizon.net

2024-SB0605-UNFav.pdf

Uploaded by: Nelda Fink

Position: UNF

SB0605 – UNFAVORABLE

Nelda Fink

MD District 32

I oppose this proposed legislation because I believe the MVA should be removed completely from the process. Our constitutions did not intend for the Transportation which is a federally run program to be interfering with the elections which are constitutionally authorized and governed by the state. I agree that it is a cooperative effort, but it comes too close to removing the sovereignty of the state and the state's elections process.

The health department involvement is the same. Again being federally funded gives the perception of federal interference in the sovereign State's election process and should therefore be removed as well.

Repeal the MVA and health department from the elections. That is the bill I will support.

100% OPPOSE this bill.

Thank you.

Nelda Fink

SB0605.pdf

Uploaded by: Suzanne Duffy

Position: UNF

SB0605 is another bad bill that does not promote voter confidence in our elections. This is NO way to verify a person's legal ability to be a verified voter, this is a completely unreliable and bad process and could be manipulated, SAY NO to it.

Suzanne Price

AACo

“Public trust in the federal government, which has been low for decades, has returned to near record lows following a modest uptick in 2020 and 2021. Currently, fewer than two-in-ten Americans say they trust the government in Washington to do what is right “just about always” (1%) or “most of the time” (15%). This is among the lowest trust measures in nearly seven decades of polling. Last year, 20% said they trusted the government just about always or most of the time.” PEW Research, Sept 2023
<https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2023/09/19/public-trust-in-government-1958-2023/>

11 - SB 605 - EEE - MHBE - LOI.docx (2).pdf

Uploaded by: Jason Caplan

Position: INFO

February 21, 2024

The Honorable Brian J. Feldman
Chair, Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
Miller Senate Office Building, 2 West
11 Bladen St.
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: Letter of Information – SB 605 – Election Law - Automatic Voter Registration - Alterations

Dear Chair Feldman and Members of the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee,

The Maryland Health Benefit Exchange (MHBE) respectfully submits this letter of information on Senate Bill (SB) 605 – Election Law - Automatic Voter Registration - Alterations. SB 605 would require MHBE to make significant alterations to the agency’s current automatic voter registration procedures for the purpose of increasing the rate of automatic voter registration state-wide.

MHBE was designated as an “Automatic voter registration agency” pursuant to HB 1007 of 2016, and subsequently set up and operates an electronic voter registration system that is integrated with the Maryland Health Connection (MHC) on-line health insurance application functionality. The system currently provides an electronic means for applicable transactions (any application for or renewal of health insurance coverage through MHC), to either register to vote or update voter registration. The user interface and file transmission of voter registration information to the State Board of Elections is fully automated.

SB 605 would require MHBE to implement the following major changes to our voter registration system:

- Integrate a data-exchange with the State Board of Elections in order to be able to determinate current voter registration information for all applicants.
- For all applicants at least 16 years of age with confirmed U.S. citizenship who **are not** currently registered to vote, MHBE would mail a non-forwardable automatic voter registration paper notice, and give each household member the option to opt **out** of being automatically registered to vote by checking a box on the notice and returning it to MHBE.
- For all applicants at least 16 years of age with confirmed U.S. citizenship who **are** currently registered to vote but whose information submitted indicates a change of address or name, MHBE would similarly mail a non-forwardable automatic voter

registration update paper notice, and give each household member the opportunity to correct any errors on the updated information and return it to MHBE.

These system changes add the following associated additional costs to MHBE: IT system change costs, print notice costs, return envelope costs, and the cost of intaking and processing returned opt out forms and address/name correction forms. MHBE estimates **\$281,000** in IT implementation costs, and ongoing IT maintenance and operations costs of **\$130,000** annually. These expenditures are not currently included in MHBE's operating budget.

MHBE serves the majority of Medicaid enrollees (around 1.2 million individuals) as well as individual market enrollees (around 200 thousand), and estimates the following annual notice volumes:

- **180,000** notices mailed to households with enrollees not currently registered to vote.
- **60,000** notices mailed to households reporting an address change.
- **24,000** returned forms.

MHBE estimates the total costs of printing, mailing, and intake and processing of returned forms associated with this estimated volume of mailed notices at around **\$620,000** in additional annual expenditures that are also not currently included in MHBE's operating budget.

MHBE is supportive of state-wide initiatives to increase automatic voter registration and would be able to operationalize the requirements of this bill should funds be made available based on the estimated associated costs.

For further discussions or questions on SB 605, please contact Johanna Fabian-Marks, Director of Policy and Plan Management at johanna.fabian-marks@maryland.gov.

Sincerely,



Michele Eberle
Executive Director