



House Ways and Means Committee
HB 641: Election Law – Curbside Voting
February 13, 2024
Position: Support

The Arc Maryland is the largest statewide membership organization that is dedicated to protecting and advancing the rights of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and supporting their families.

We support HB 641 as we believe it will increase access to the fundamental right to vote for people with disabilities. HB 641 requires that local boards of elections establish requirements governing curbside voting, ensure that curbside voting locations are accessible in communities historically disenfranchised, and accessible to public transportation stops for easy access, and ensure the preservation of voting rights and privacy.

Protections for voting privacy have also been contemplated in this year's bill language. The bill states that people will be given a choice of using a paper ballot or a ballot marking device at the curbside voting location, and if the voter uses the paper ballot, the voter may personally deposit the ballot into a container provided by the election judge. This seems to satisfy previous concerns about vote privacy in last years' Curbside Voting bill.

Curbside voting is something that could benefit all registered voters, including people with disabilities. We believe this is important as voting is a fundamental right that Maryland's citizens with developmental disabilities want and need. Over the years, there have been good bills to enhance access for people with disabilities to exercise their right to vote, however physical access to the polls still remains one of the leading remaining barriers for people with physical disabilities. Increased access brings voters out: with more voting options available in the 2020 election, 62% of people with disabilities voted. This was a six-point increase over the 2016 elections.

Please see the following testimony from Danielle Bustos, a member of The Arc Maryland's Governmental Affairs Committee and person with a disability who asked The Arc to adjoin her testimony to our organizational testimony:

“Hello, my name is Danielle Bustos, and I am writing in support of the curbside voting bill. I am a person with a disability as well as someone who serves people with disabilities. I use a power chair full time and drive an adapted vehicle. I work at Independence now, a center for independent living as an independent living specialist and the coordinator of our youth program.

I believe having the ability to vote from my vehicle would provide better accessibility as well as streamline the voting process. Whenever I've gone to vote in person there always seems to be an issue. Although most of these issues seem to be from a human perspective or prejudices there is also an issue of accessibility. There are two options when voting at my local voting branch: on paper or on the screen. If I vote on paper, I must lean over the table which hurts my back because I have no arms. If I use the screen, I can raise my chair using the elevation feature but then I can't reach the screen itself as I have no arms. In addition to that there is a sort of pressure that is felt when people are staring at you voting whether it be because they have never seen someone in a wheelchair with no arms voting or whether they are genuinely trying to find out how they can help. I believe having the ability to vote from the vehicle will eliminate this pressure and give more accessibility for people like me to feel included in the election process.



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As we continue to work toward equitable access for all to the polls, this bill takes us further down the right path; eliminating yet another barrier to voting for people with disabilities.

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