



TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE

HB 201 - Election Law - Absentee Ballot Application - Sending to Eligible Voters Before Primary Elections

POSITION: Favorable with Amendments

BY: Linda Kohn, President

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The League of Women Voters, representing members in every district of Maryland, supports HB 201 and measures to involve every voter in Maryland in an easy and equitable voting process. LWVMD's position on Voting Rights and Election Administration calls for an election system that is representative, feasible to implement, and increases voter participation.

In Maryland, when Rockville used vote-by-mail for the first time in its 2019 Mayoral election, turnout almost doubled from about 16% in 2015 to about 31% in 2019.¹ In contrast, in Maryland's 2020 Primary Election, using VBM for the first time in a statewide contest, voter turnout was about the same as in the 2016 primary election at just over 40%.² These statistics show that, at most, voting by mail can significantly increase voter participation or at least not hurt turnout.

The League knows that voting by mail has advantages. VBM can be helpful for senior citizens or voters living in rural or remote areas who may find it difficult to travel to vote. It can also help younger voters who may move out of state or out of district and do not have the luxury of returning home for an election.

The State Board of Elections has already put into place procedures and policies around vote by mail. This bill would add another safeguard to ensure that as many voters can vote as possible with whatever option works best for them. Many times, voters will not always know if they can vote in person, either during early voting or on the actual election day. Voters always have the choice of requesting to vote by mail, but HB 201

¹ Rockville Board of Supervisors of Elections report on November 5, 2019 Election Report, April 6, 2020

² Department of Legislative Services, Office of Policy Analysis, "Covid-19 and Voting By Mail," Presentation to the Senate Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee and the House Committee Ways and Means, June 16, 2020.



would take the guesswork out of going to the SBE website to request the ballot. It would also continue to educate Maryland voters that voting by mail is a safe option.

Moreover, in light of the recent election, there were many confused voters. They did not know if their ballots had been received or where exactly they were meant to vote. This led to many provisional ballots having to be used. If HB 201 is enacted, there is a possibility that it could help alleviate that burden on the voter as well as election judges on election day. In order to work effectively, HB 201 would have to be applied to both primary and general elections.

The League is very happy with this bill, but in light of our support for expanding voter participation, we would respectfully ask for one amendment to this bill: that it would apply **before the primary *and* general elections**.

LWVMD urges a favorable report with the above amendment for HB 201.