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### ***Testimony – State Board of Elections***

#### **HB 263 - Chair, Government, Labor and Elections Committee (By Request – Departmental – State Board of Elections)**

#### **Election Law - Early Voting Centers - Bus Stops**

##### Purposes:

- Expand access to early voting locations
- Potentially increase voter turnout, especially among residents who face the barriers of limited mobility and transportation options

##### Comments:

The State Board of Elections supports this legislation.

This bill would require public bus routes funded by counties and municipalities to stop at early voting locations within half a mile of their fixed routes, to the extent feasible. There are 16 total days of early voting in each even-numbered year during which this provision would apply. MTA- and WMATA-operated routes, and express and commuter buses, are exempted.

This legislation will help facilitate civic participation. Early voting is popular among Maryland voters, and use of early voting sites has been growing in recent election cycles. Almost 990,000 Marylanders cast a ballot at an early voting center in 2024. One reason for their popularity is that early voting sites are vote centers that serve any voter in the county, and are not precinct specific. Public transportation services the county population and are a key factor in site selection of an early voting center. However, early voting centers cannot be placed precisely at the bus stops. Therefore, while we attempt to accommodate voters with public transportation access, voters may still need to walk to the early voting center. This could have a negative impact on individuals with disabilities, people with small children, or the elderly. By having the bus route stop directly in front of the early voting center with a minimum deviation of the fixed route, we are ensuring maximum participation for those sites.

An individual who wants to cast an in-person ballot should not be potentially disenfranchised due to a limitation of public transit.

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