

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 263.docx electi

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TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 263

Election Law – Early Voting Centers – Bus Stops

Position: Support with Amendment

Hearing Date: February 4, 2026

House Government, Labor, and Elections Committee

Sponsor: Chair, Government, Labor, and Elections Committee (By Request – Departmental – State Board of Elections)

Cross-file: SB 100

Mat Rice submits this testimony on behalf of People On The Go Maryland (POG), Maryland's statewide self advocacy and systems advocacy organization run for and by people with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities. POG supports HB 263 because transportation is a practical barrier to voting for many Marylanders, and this bill takes a clear, common-sense step to make early voting centers easier to reach. POG respectfully requests a favorable report.

Why this bill matters

Early voting is only accessible when people can get to the early voting center safely and on time. For people with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities, transportation can be the difference between voting and not voting. Some people do not drive, some rely on supports to travel, and many use public transportation or paratransit. If a bus can stop at the entrance of an early voting center when the center is close to the route, it helps people navigate a new place, reduces long or confusing walks, and supports independent community participation.

HB 263 requires buses operating on certain fixed local routes to allow passengers to embark and disembark at the entrance of early voting centers located within one-half mile of the route, to

the maximum extent practicable and consistent with accessibility requirements. POG appreciates that the bill includes an accessibility standard and a practicability standard.

Friendly amendment to include statewide paratransit-type systems

POG also respectfully offers a friendly amendment so the same access goal can be available to people who rely on statewide paratransit-type systems, not only fixed local bus routes. Many eligible riders use demand-response or complementary paratransit service rather than a fixed-route bus. Including those services would better match the real transportation options available to voters with disabilities across Maryland.

Proposed friendly amendment concept (plain language):

- When an early voting center is located near a public transit route OR is served by a publicly funded paratransit/demand-response program, the transit provider should, to the maximum extent practicable and consistent with accessibility and safety requirements, allow riders to be dropped off and picked up at the entrance of the early voting center on early voting days.

Proposed friendly amendment language (draft, for consideration):

- In §10–301.1(e)(1)(ii), remove the exclusions that prevent the subsection from applying to statewide transit systems, and add a new clause to cover paratransit/demand-response service. For example, revise the applicability section to include:

"This subsection applies with respect to (1) a fixed-route public bus service funded or operated by the State, a county, or a municipal corporation (or a contractor), and (2) a publicly funded paratransit, demand-response, or complementary paratransit service that provides transportation to members of the public, including riders with disabilities."

- Then revise the duty section to allow both fixed-route stops and paratransit drop-off/pick-up at the early voting center entrance, when feasible and accessible.

POG offers this as a friendly amendment in the spirit of the bill's purpose: making early voting centers easier to reach for more Maryland voters.

About People On The Go Maryland

People On The Go Maryland is a statewide self advocacy and systems advocacy organization run for and by people with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities. We work to ensure people have the information, supports, and opportunities needed to participate in their communities—including exercising the right to vote.

Conclusion

HB 263 promotes practical access to early voting centers by addressing a real transportation barrier. With a friendly amendment to include statewide paratransit-type systems, the bill's benefits could reach even more voters who rely on accessible transportation. POG respectfully requests a favorable report. Thank you for your time and consideration.

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