

February 9, 2020

**Testimony on HB 465
Election Law-Campaign Material- Disclosure of the Use of Bots
Ways and Means**

Position: Favorable

Common Cause Maryland supports HB 465 which would require candidates and campaign finance entities to disclose the usage of bots for their campaign as campaign material. This legislation would also give the State Board of Elections the authority to remove the campaign material.

A Bot is an automated online account where all or substantially all of the actions or posts of that account are not the result of a person. Bots can be advantageous because they perform tasks that are both simple and structurally repetitive, at a much higher rate than would be possible for a human alone. However, research has shown that bots or fake accounts enabled by artificial intelligence on social media have evolved and are now better able to copy human behaviors in order to avoid detection.¹

Though all bots are not meant to be malicious, bots have definitely become a tool for deception in elections. When bots are used in order to confuse or mislead voters on a large scale that is a problem because of how authentic bots appear to be and how great of an influence they tend to have. Even though online companies have put effort into mitigating abuse and misuse of bots, more effort has to be put into keeping up with evolving technology.

In order to have a democratic process free of external influence, we need legislation like HB 465 that helps identify bots being used during elections. Note that Webpages and Social Media accounts are already considered campaign materials, it only makes sense that Maryland takes the extra step to classify bots being used by campaigns as campaign material as well.

When voters are targeted and deceived it not only creates a distrust in our election system, it takes away the voters right to make a knowledgeable and well-informed decisions. If candidates are able to mislead voters, it negatively impacts participation in our democracy. That is why we are in support of HB 465.

We urge a favorable report.

¹ <https://phys.org/news/2018-02-bots-danger-political-election-campaigns.html>