

February 18, 2020

Testimony on HB 881
Election Law - Voting by Absentee Ballot - Prepaid Postage for Return of Ballots
Ways and Means

Position: Favorable

Common Cause Maryland supports HB 881, which would require that absentee ballots be accompanied with a prepaid postage as well as instructions for their return. Common Cause strives to ensure that our electoral process be as open and as accessible as possible. HB 881 provides one way to do so.

The state has long accommodated those who could not vote on Election Day with absentee ballots that can be mailed back with their vote. This process for using absentee ballots should be as seamless as possible so that voters can participate in the franchise with ease. Absentee ballots are essential in making sure that the voice of those who cannot vote in person will still be heard.

Their utility is undermined, however, because ballots can require multiple stamps which most voters are not typically used to affixing to regular mail. When voters realize they need to use multiple stamps, even this realization can be a hindrance if the voter does not have the stamps to send these votes back. Even though a stamp is a miniscule cost to most Marylanders, we should strive to ensure that there is never a cost to having your voice heard in our elections.

What's more is that the policy of the United State Postal Service is to already deliver ballots regardless of whether they have the correct postage. HB 881 merely codifies this in Maryland law and helps to ensure that Marylanders know their rights under USPS policy.

With declining voter participation during the most recent election cycles, the state should become resourceful in identifying ways to encourage citizen participation. With HB 881 a voter can complete their ballot and immediately send it back without having to worry about a stamp. This discreet but simple measure has the potential to ensure that more voters participate in elections.

For those reasons Common Cause Maryland supports HB 881 and encourages a favorable report.