



Maryland Association of Election Officials

Representing the Local Election Boards of the State of Maryland

March 1, 2021

The Honorable Paul G. Pinsky, Chair
Maryland Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee
2 West, Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401-1991

RE: SB683 – Information

Senator Pinsky and Committee Members:

My name is Katherine Berry. I am the Election Director in Carroll County and the co-chair of the Maryland Association of Election Officials (MAEO) Legislative Committee. MAEO represents the local boards of elections throughout the State of Maryland. I am writing today representing myself and MAEO with information regarding SB683 – Election Law – Permanent Absentee Ballot List.

This bill would require that the State Board of Elections implement procedures and software to manage a permanent absentee ballot list. MAEO supports all efforts to encourage voter turnout while also recognizing logistical concerns due to the amount of staff and technology required to perform the additional tasks that this bill is requiring.

We recognize that many other states have implemented a permanent absentee ballot list. Historically, there are voters who contact the local board of elections offices just days before an election asking why they haven't received a ballot by mail. When they find out that an application is required each election cycle, most times voters state that they completed an application in the last election cycle and assumed it was applicable to all elections thereafter. This bill would certainly help that scenario. Even more commonly, though, voters move to another address and do not update their address with the local board of elections office. So, the voter's ballot would be returned to the local board of elections office and the potential requirement to contact the voter becomes an administrative function that most local boards do not have the capacity to manage.

It is of critical importance that this committee recognize the constraints that the State Board of Elections and local boards of elections are under when it comes to fiscal impact of implementation of a process that requires technology that hasn't been created in the current voter registration database and the personnel necessity to make sure all voters are notified and processed in a consistent manner. We want to be able to make sure all voters who request a ballot are provided a ballot to vote in whichever manner they wish, so a major voter education campaign will be necessary to target individuals specifically interested in registering as a permanent absentee voter. In addition, the ongoing cost of sending notifications to permanent absentee voters is one that the local governments and the State need to work together to manage.

MAEO has a strong desire to be able to complete our jobs, do it well and do it efficiently while also providing high-quality service to our voters. We are hopeful that this committee can assist in ensuring that there is enough funding to support appropriate technology, staff, and office space to handle an influx of capacity to this program.

Thank you for your time. If you have any questions, please contact me at (410)386-2958 or Katherine.berry@maryland.gov.