



SB 831: Election Reform Act of 2021

Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee

March 3, 2021

Position: FAVOR

Chairman Pinsky, Vice Chair Kagan, and Committee Members,

We support this excellent bill, which makes many improvements in our elections. While some of the provisions of this legislation are outside of our areas of expertise, we would like to highlight a few that fall within the scope of our organization's work.

1. It would increase the transparency of state and local boards of elections processes, including requiring the posting of meeting materials in advance of meetings and requiring the retention of meeting recordings. Posting of meeting materials in advance provides notice of the contents of the meeting with sufficient time for interested members of the public to sign up to comment and/or to submit written testimony before the meeting. Retention of recordings enables the public to hear the discussions that took place during the meetings, not just the summaries provided in the meeting minutes. At a time when public trust in government in general and in elections in particular is at an all-time low, increasing the transparency of government operations will help to restore confidence in our elections.
2. It would require public debates for candidates for Governor, US Senator, and US Representative, overseen by a debate commission to ensure fair and equitable access and procedures for candidates. This would enable voters to view candidates side by side and compare their answers to important questions.
3. It expands the days and hours available for early voting, which was highly successful during the 2020 elections. It also expands the use of drop boxes to ensure the secure and timely receipt of voted absentee ballots.
4. It establishes a "curing" process for both absentee ballot applications and absentee ballots themselves, so that voters could be notified about and correct errors that would cause an application or ballot to be rejected.
5. It reserves the electronic delivery of absentee ballots, as most other states do, for voters who need to receive their ballots via the internet. This would improve the security and privacy of Maryland's absentee voting and decrease the burden on local elections staff, who must hand-transcribe each voter-printed ballot onto an official ballot that can be read by the scanners that count the votes. In the 2020 general election, this processing caused MD to be among the last states to finish counting our absentee ballots despite being the earliest to begin processing them.

We urge you to return a favorable report on this important and timely bill.

Rebecca Wilson, Co-Director

SAVE our Votes: Secure, Accessible, Verifiable Elections for Maryland

rebecca@SAVEourVotes.org 202.601.8182