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Suite 102
College Park, MD 20740

Committee: Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs
Testimony on: SB 683 – Election Law – Permanent Absentee Ballot List
Position: Favorable
Hearing Date: March 3, 2021

The Maryland Sierra Club urges a favorable report on SB 683. This important bill will allow an eligible voter to opt in to be placed on a permanent list to receive an absentee ballot for every election until the voter changes their preferences.

The Sierra Club and its members care about both the natural and human environments, including ending racial and social injustice. We believe that providing information about and access to registration and voting to all who are eligible should be viewed as fundamental to our democracy.

As a grassroots organization, the Sierra Club supports efforts to make voting as accessible and convenient as possible for all eligible voters, regardless of whether they choose to vote in person at Early Voting Centers or on election day or by mail.

Under current law, an eligible voter who cannot vote in person must fill out and submit an application in each election year in order to vote by absentee ballot. This requirement is an unnecessary hurdle that has disproportionate impact on individuals who cannot ever vote in person because of a medical condition, physical limitation, living situation or other reason.

Maintaining a permanent list of absentee ballot voters will relieve those voters from the burden of remembering election dates and application deadlines, requesting an application, filling out the application and ensuring its delivery to their board of elections. It will also free election board workers from having to spend the time and cost to process these transactions during their busiest pre-election weeks.

Voting is the foundation of our democracy, and we believe it is essential to racial and social justice to make registration and voting as accessible and convenient as possible for every individual who is eligible.

We urge a favorable report on SB 683.

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Founded in 1892, the Sierra Club is America's oldest and largest grassroots environmental organization. The Maryland Chapter has over 70,000 members and supporters, and the Sierra Club nationwide has approximately 800,000 members.