

SB 683 - Election Law - Permanent Absentee Ballot

Uploaded by: Antoine, Joanne

Position: FAV

March 3, 2021

Testimony on SB 683
Election Law - Permanent Absentee Ballot List
Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

Position: Favorable

Common Cause Maryland supports SB 683 which would provide eligible voters seeking to use the mail-in voting process the opportunity to opt into a permanent list where ballots are automatically for each election.

Maryland, like many states, offers “no excuse” absentee or mail-in ballots, meaning that eligible voters can receive a mail-in ballot without having to provide a reason. This level accessibility to our elections has proven to be a vital program for many voters, including voters with disabilities and voters confined to their place of residence for other varying reasons, but should be improved to create greater convenience for those needing to utilize the program the most.

Currently, eligible voters have to request a mail-in ballot for each election. This requirement is confusing and an unnecessary barrier for voters who need to regularly vote by mail. Many may miss the mail-in ballot request deadline or don’t realize they have to request to receive their ballot by mail for the entire election cycle, leaving them at risk of not being able to participate in the election.

SB 683 aims to streamline the process so eligible voters can request their mail-in ballot and opt into receiving future ballots automatically by mail. Eligible voters choosing to opt into the permanent list are provided with the opportunity to update their information or opt out.

According to NCSL, five states allow any eligible voter to opt into a permanent mail-in voting list: Arizona, California, Minnesota, Montana, New Jersey, and the District of Columbia. Implementation of this program in these states has created greater convenience as voters no longer have to request a ballot multiple times per year, cut costs as the need for processing ballot requests is greatly reduced, and helps to increase overall participation.

Suggested amendment: The legislation does not outline details on how to handle ballots that are undeliverable. We recommend removing voters from the permanent list when voter fails to return ballot or mail is returned as undeliverable in two consecutive statewide election. We also recommend requiring notice to voter, at least 45 days before ballot is sent, notifying them that ballot is on the way.

SB 683 improves overall accessibility to our elections for voters needing to use the mail-in voting process the most. We urge a favorable report.

SB 683 - MD DC AFL-CIO - SUPPORT.pdf

Uploaded by: Edwards, Donna

Position: FAV



MARYLAND STATE & D.C. AFL-CIO

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SB 683 – Election Law – Permanent Absentee Ballot List Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee March 3, 2021

SUPPORT

**Donna S. Edwards
President
Maryland State and DC AFL-CIO**

Good afternoon, Chair Pinsky, and members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony supporting SB 683 – Election Law – Permanent Absentee Ballot List. My name is Donna S. Edwards, and I am the President of the Maryland State and District of Columbia AFL-CIO. On behalf of the 340,000 union members, I offer the following comments.

SB 683 is a commonsense voting reform that creates a smooth and easy process for voters to vote by mail. Instead of having to request an absentee ballot, for every election – and needing to know the start and stop dates for making the request – voters could ask to be placed on a permanent list for all future elections to vote by mail.

Considering the unprecedented election last year and the challenges faced by county boards of election with respect to the widespread use of mail-in ballots, it makes sense to set up a process to administer the vote-by-mail program more easily and with greater predictability. Removing a large portion of voters from having to request their mail-in ballot, knowing that it will be mailed to them, reduces the number of steps it takes to vote, lessening the load on both the voters who choose to be placed on the permanent absentee ballot list, as well as the county boards and the State boards who must process all of the requests.

SB 683 is reversible for the voter, as well. If they no longer wish to vote absentee, they can request to be removed from the Permanent Absentee Ballot List. Therefore, no one is stuck in one form of voting or another. They have the freedom to choose which style of voting they like best, and, more importantly, they have the freedom to change their mind.

We ask for a favorable report on SB 683.

SB683 Permanent Absentee Ballot_League of Women Vo

Uploaded by: Kohn, Linda

Position: FAV



TESTIMONY TO THE SENATE EDUCATION, HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

SB 683 – Election Law – Permanent Absentee Ballot List

POSITION: Favorable

BY: Lois Hybl & Richard Willson, Co-Presidents

DATE: March 3, 2021

The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan organization that works to increase understanding of major public policy issues and influence public policy through education and advocacy. **We support SB683 because we support the use of a permanent absentee ballot list that gives voters the choice to receive their ballot in the mail on an ongoing basis.**

The 2020 General Election demonstrated that expanded absentee voting is feasible and acceptable to voters. Approximately 50 percent of voters—in a year of high turnout—voted by absentee (mail-in) ballot. Voters effectively followed instructions and according to the State Board of Elections (SBE), only 0.24% of mail-in ballots were rejected. Furthermore, for the more than 1.5 million voters who used mail-in voting in the fall of 2020, the SBE has a good start on updating the voter registration list, a common concern voiced about ballots by mail. And although it is called “permanent,” voters would be able to remove themselves from the list should their circumstances or preferences change.

While absentee voting can be a convenience for many voters, it particularly benefits voters with transportation problems or disabilities as well as parents and other caretakers. Voters are not restricted to voting only during the hours a precinct or voting center is open so voting need not interfere with anybody’s work schedule, whether it’s someone working multiple jobs or a senior executive.

The LWVMD, representing 1500+ concerned citizens throughout Maryland, urges a favorable report on SB683.

SB0683_Permanent_Absentee_Ballot_MLC_FAV.docx.pdf

Uploaded by: Plante, Cecilia

Position: FAV



**TESTIMONY FOR SB0683
ELECTION LAW – PERMANENT ABSENTEE BALLOT LIST**

Bill Sponsor: Senator Kramer

Committee: Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

Organization Submitting: Maryland Legislative Coalition

Person Submitting: Cecilia Plante, co-chair

Position: FAVORABLE

I am submitting this testimony in favor of SB0683 on behalf of the Maryland Legislative Coalition. The Maryland Legislative Coalition is an association of activists - individuals and grassroots groups in every district in the state. We are unpaid citizen lobbyists, and our Coalition supports well over 30,000 members.

This bill will allow for any voter to file a request to be on a permanent absentee ballot list, which will mean that they automatically get a mail-in ballot for each election. There are provisions for the state Board of Elections to communicate with the voter during the process, as well as a process to ensure that the voter receives the ballot at their current address when they change addresses. Finally, there is a process to ensure that the voter can remove themselves from the permanent absentee ballot list.

It has been shown that states that have implemented this form of permanent mail-in ballots have a higher percentage of voters participating in the voting process. This is an admirable goal, and one that we feel the state should reach for.

The Maryland Legislative Coalition supports this bill and recommends a **FAVORABLE** report in committee.

SB0683_Maryland PIRG_Rishi Shah_FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Shah, Rishi

Position: FAV

Maryland PIRG

Testimony for SB683

Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee

Wednesday, Mar. 3, 2021

Election Law – Permanent Absentee Ballot List

POSITION: FAVORABLE

Maryland PIRG is a state based, non-partisan, citizen funded public interest advocacy organization with grassroots members across the state and a student funded, student directed chapter at the University of Maryland College Park. For forty five years we've stood up to powerful interests whenever they threaten our health and safety, our financial security, or our right to fully participate in our democratic society.

We support SB683 to create a permanent absentee ballot list for Maryland voters. Voters should be able to apply to be on a permanent mail-in ballot list so that they will receive a ballot in the mail for every upcoming election without having to fill out paperwork every year. This legislation means that elderly people, people with disabilities, and people who know they'll vote by mail don't have to fill out the same form for every election. It's more efficient for voters and elections administrators and will reduce the likelihood of voters missing the deadline to do so.

It is unnecessary for elderly people and people with disabilities who can't make it to the polls to have to request an absentee ballot every year. That's resulted in [a significant voter participation gap between people with and without disabilities](#). And with Maryland's "no-excuse" vote by mail system, all voters who want to join a permanent absentee ballot list should be able to.

Requiring someone who wants to vote to fill out a new mail-in ballot request every year means multiple additional steps in the voting process, knowing specific deadlines, and increased cost to voters and the state.

Permanent absentee voting lists work in other places. [Five states, as well as Washington D.C., have already implemented permanent mail-in ballot lists, and several other states have these lists](#) for voters with permanent disabilities and/or senior voters as well. Additionally, a study of San Diego County found that [a permanent absentee voting list increased both voter turnout and the likelihood that voters will participate in the next election](#).

We respectfully request a favorable report.

SB683 - Permanent Absentee Ballot List - EHEA - Kr

Uploaded by: Tulkin, Josh

Position: FAV



7338 Baltimore Ave
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.

Rich Norling
Chair, Political Committee
Rich.Norling@MDSierra.org

Josh Tulkin
Chapter Director
Josh.Tulkin@MDSierra.org

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.

National Vote at Home Coalition Testimony for MD S

Uploaded by: Tabuteau, Richard

Position: FWA

Testimony of The National Vote at Home Coalition In Support of Maryland's SB 683

Thank you Chair Pinsky and committee members for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of SB 683. The National Vote at Home Coalition (NVAHC) is pleased to join local leaders in support of this measure with some proposed technical amendments that focus on more seamless implementation and are grateful for your time and attention. NVAHC is a nonpartisan nonprofit dedicated to making sure every American can vote in secure, safe, accessible, and equitable elections by expanding vote-at-home systems in all 50 states.

Currently in Maryland, voters that want to vote absentee must apply for an absentee ballot for every single election. Not only is this a burden on voters, it's also an expensive administrative burden on local election officials: they must process all requests election after election, year after year from many of the same voters. This duplication of effort wastes vital resources that could be directed elsewhere.

Creating a permanent absentee status will benefit both voters and election officials. Using this single sign-up option, voters will be mailed a ballot for every election and won't have to keep track of a variety of deadlines in order to receive a ballot and participate. We believe deeply in giving voters more options to cast their votes in a way that is convenient for them and this bill does exactly that.

Election officials, on the other hand, will save the time and money they might have otherwise spent processing absentee ballot requests for voters who regularly vote absentee. Our organization estimates that it costs on average \$1 for an office to process an individual absentee ballot request. By creating a permanent list, if only half of all mail voters from the 2020 general election signed up to vote absentee again, Maryland could save \$1.6 million each election cycle by simply eliminating duplicate requests for each election and sending out absentee ballots from an ongoing list rather than processing individual requests. Furthermore, as more voters register to vote by mail (as typically happens when mail ballots become more accessible), the pressure placed on election officials at in-person voting locations on election day will be reduced.

We applaud the thought and consideration put into SB 683 to build upon the successes of 2020. We are glad to lend our support as the bill continues through the process and look forward to working with the legislature to refine the details with technical amendments in a working group or subcommittee to make sure that processes work for both election officials and the voters they work so hard to serve.

NFINK-D32-UNFAVORABLE-SB683.pdf

Uploaded by: Fink, Nelda

Position: UNF

Written Testimony OPPOSING of SB 683 – Election Law – Permanent Absentee Ballot List
Nelda Fink, 8372 Norwood Dr, Millersville
MD District 32

Honorable Senator Pinsky - Chair, Honorable Senator Kagan - Vice Chair, Honorable committee members,

This bill doesn't even make sense as there is no legitimate reason for a citizen to be permanently absent. They need to establish residency in their new location and vote there. This bill will only allow for possible fraud as the administrators will not be able to track people if they receive this status. It is important for the citizens of Maryland to have people who actually reside in Maryland to participate in the elections, not people who live elsewhere. Please OPPOSE this bill!

Sincerely,

Nelda Fink, 8372 Norwood Dr, Millersville
MD District 32

SB 683 – Election Law – Permanent Absentee Ballot List – UNFAVORABLE (OPPOSE)

SB683 Permanent Absentee List.pdf

Uploaded by: Berry, Katherine

Position: INFO



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.