

SB 766 - State Board of Elections and Local Boards

Uploaded by: Antoine, Joanne

Position: FAV

March 3, 2021

Testimony on SB 766
State Board of Elections and Local Boards of Elections - Membership and Staff
Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

Position: Favorable

Common Cause Maryland supports SB 766 which would establish the position of Racial Equity Coordinator within the State Board of Elections to assess and address systemic barriers experienced by Black and brown voters when exercising their right to vote in our elections.

Common Cause recognizes that our effort to preserve and strengthen American democracy cannot be realized without a firm commitment to dismantling white supremacy. Inequalities, specifically racial inequalities, have been created and sustained over time and that is evident in our elections where communities of color have encountered a longstanding history of racially discriminatory and oppressive laws that limit access to voting.

Since *the Shelby County v. Holder* decision, these voters have reported experiencing significant barriers to voting – many states putting restrictive voting regulations in place that target and disenfranchise Black and brown voters. While Maryland has worked to combat attempts to suppress the vote and championed a number of reforms that increase access to voter registration and voting, there are jurisdiction with some of the largest populations of Black and brown voters who still face obstacles to voting.

In 2016, jurisdictions such as Baltimore City and Montgomery County suffered various issues due to an inadequate number of trained election judges. There were reports of polls opening late, long lines, judges failing to show up on election days and a number of other incidents that could have been avoided if more Marylanders were being encouraged to serve in these roles. Both jurisdictions dealt with similar issues in the 2018 election as well. In 2018, jurisdictions like Prince George's County underestimated voter turnout, running out of paper ballots and leaving voters waiting for over six hours in line to vote - ultimately repressing votes, as citizens must return to jobs, family, or other responsibilities without being able to cast their ballot. In Charles County, an early voting sites closed entirely in 2018 leaving a number of voters with no alternative to voting that day. We also continue to disenfranchise eligible incarcerated voters, majority being Black and brown.

SB 766 would provide us the opportunity to look at the deeper root causes and, hopefully, move toward conducting elections where all eligible Marylanders have the ability to cast their vote and have their voice heard without facing obstacles to voting.

We urge a favorable report.

MLW Written Testimony SB766.pdf

Uploaded by: Washington, Mary

Position: FAV

MARY L. WASHINGTON, PH.D
Legislative District 43
Baltimore City

Education, Health, and
Environmental Affairs Committee

Chair
Joint Committee on Ending
Homelessness

Chair
Joint Committee on Children,
Youth, and Families



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SUPPORT – SB 766

**State Board of Elections and Local Boards of Elections - Membership
and Staff**

Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee

Testimony of Senator Mary Washington, March 3, 2021

Chair Pinsky, Vice-Chair Kagan and Members of the Committee,

SB766 is a bill that aims to ensure election integrity for our election systems and equal access to the polls for all Marylanders. Right now, our State Board of Elections is not equipped to address the inequities that occur in ballot access, and our local boards are not adequately representative of the counties they serve. SB766 addresses these concerns in three different ways:

First, it requires that all members of the State Board of Elections have extensive knowledge of Maryland's election laws and at least 5 years of experience in administering elections. Those tasked with keeping our elections secure and efficient should not be appointed unless they are experts in the field. Every member of the board with intimate knowledge of our election's security systems but not enough knowledge about secure election administration introduces a point of weakness to our elections. The bill adds a provision that the Maryland Association of Election Officials submits one name to the Board as well.

Second, it targets racial disparities in our elections. SB766 requires that the State Board appoint a Racial Equity Coordinator who will ensure equity in treatment and access to resources in the election process, investigate racial disparities in ballot access and voter turnout, make recommendations to the State Board on ways to improve racial equity in our elections, and submit an annual report to the General Assembly with details about all of these activities and recommendations. The State Board will be required to publish this report online publicly.

A 2014 Brennan Center study found that polling stations serving places with higher proportions of Black residents had fewer polling machines and workers and longer lines in general elections. The Brennan Center found similar results last year, specifically that in Prince George's County, thirteen precincts ran out of ballots on Election Day because the County's Board of Elections underestimated the number of people who would vote in person. We need this new racial equity coordinator to ensure these kinds of disparities do not occur in the future.

Finally, SB766 overhauls the appointment process for local Boards of Elections. In Maryland, members of local Boards of Elections are appointed by the Governor, which creates an unfair partisan advantage to whoever holds the Governor's office. This bill would shift the Governor's power to appoint and remove members of local Boards of Elections to local jurisdictions. This is an important step in ensuring that our election officials' powers are derived from the people they serve.

The Boards of Elections in Prince George's County, Baltimore City, and Montgomery County, which overwhelmingly vote for Democrats, are led by Republican members appointed by our Republican Governor. At some point in the future, when a Democrat fills the Governorship, Boards of Elections in Maryland's rural counties that vote overwhelmingly Republican may be led by Democrats. Neither of these scenarios are representative of the voters these Boards serve.

This bill is a crucial overhaul of our election system to make sure that all Marylanders are fully and equally represented in our Boards of Elections. In continuing the General Assembly's mission to protect election integrity, increase voting access, and ensure fair representation, I ask that you for a favorable report on SB766.

In partnership,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Mary Washington". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "M" and a long, sweeping underline.

Senator Mary Washington, District 43, Baltimore City

NFINK-D32-OPPOSE-SB766-HB1249.pdf

Uploaded by: Fink, Nelda

Position: UNF

Written Testimony UNFAVORABLE for SB 766/ HB 1249 – State Board of Elections and Local Boards of Elections - Membership and Staff - OPPOSE
Nelda Fink, 8372 Norwood Dr, Millersville
MD District 32

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

I feel this bill is unnecessary. This bill follows the "racial equity" narrative which in and of itself is divisive. We do not need any more division in our country. Staffing needs to be per party not by race and needs to be provided fairly. Having experience at any level should not be necessary and the less experience one has with the election system, the more open minded they will be and expose that which is not done fairly. Please OPPOSE this bill.

Sincerely,

Nelda Fink, 8372 Norwood Dr, Millersville
MD District 32

UNFAVORABLE / OPPOSE SB 766/ HB 1249 – State Board of Elections and Local Boards of Elections - Membership and Staff