

HB656 Election Law.pdf

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Position: FAV

HB656 Election Law - Early Voting Centers - Accessibility by Public Transportation– SUPPORT

Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee, March 25, 2021

Centers for Independent Living are federally established nonprofit disability resource and advocacy organizations located throughout Maryland operated by and for people with disabilities. Center staff and Boards are at least 51% people with disabilities. We are part of a nationwide network of Centers for Independent Living (CILs) providing the following core services: Information and Referral; Advocacy; Peer Support; Independent Living Skills training and Transition Services.

As organizations that serve many public transit system users who are also people with disabilities, we believe in creating the most access possible to voting centers. This bill will further that access by when possible allowing public transit vehicles to drop off and pick up passengers at the front of the voting center.

Supporting this bill will create one less barrier to getting to a voting center to those who have trouble walking longer distances. It also furthers Maryland's efforts to establish an inclusive voting environment where everything possible is done to ease obstacles to voting.

The undersigned Centers for Independent Living urge you to support HB 656.

Katie Collins-Ihrke, Executive Director
Accessible Resources for Independence
1406B Crain Hwy South, Suite 206
Glen Burnie, MD 21061

Sarah Sorensen, Executive Director
Independence Now
12301 Old Columbia Pike, Suite 101
Silver Spring, MD 20904

Michael Bullis, Executive Director
IMAGE Center
Hampton Plaza, 300 E. Joppa Road, Suite 312
Towson, MD 21286

Dave Drezner
The Freedom Center
550 Highland Street, Suite 510
Frederick, MD 21701

X HB 656 - MDDCAFLCIO - SUPPORT.pdf

Uploaded by: Edwards, Donna

Position: FAV



MARYLAND STATE & D.C. AFL-CIO

AFFILIATED WITH NATIONAL AFL-CIO

7 School Street • Annapolis, Maryland 21401-2096

Office. (410) 269-1940 • Fax (410) 280-2956

President

Donna S. Edwards

Secretary-Treasurer

Gerald W. Jackson

HB 656 – Election Law – Early Voting Centers – Accessibility by Public Transportation Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee March 25, 2021

SUPPORT

Donna S. Edwards

President

Maryland State and DC AFL-CIO

Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support HB 656 – Election Law – Early Voting Centers – Accessibility by Public Transportation. My name is Donna S. Edwards, and I am the President of the Maryland State and DC AFL-CIO. On behalf of the 340,000 union members in the state of Maryland, I offer the following comments.

Organized Labor supports all efforts to make voting easier for Americans. Removing hurdles and barriers to voting for more people should be the continuing mission of all of us. Voters come from all walks of life and some face challenges that we have never seen. We need to meet the voters where they are, to ensure that they have every available opportunity to vote.

HB 656 is simple and straightforward: In any county with a fixed route public transportation service – and local bus routes come within a half mile of an Early Voting Location – buses will drop off and receive passengers at the entrance to the Early Voting Location. This ensures that voters who are dependent on public transportation, have the accessibility they need to exercise their franchise to vote. If they do not want to vote-by-mail, or they cannot take time off from work on Election Day, they now have an expanded opportunity to cast their vote during the Early Voting period, at an EV Center that lies within a half mile of local bus route..

We must expand opportunities to vote and remove barriers from voting, for all Marylanders. **We ask for a favorable vote on HB 656.**

HB 656 Senate Accessible Voting Locations.pdf

Uploaded by: Walmsley, Keith

Position: FAV



Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council

EMPOWERMENT • OPPORTUNITY • INCLUSION

Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee
HB 656: Election Law - Early Voting Centers - Accessibility by Public Transportation
March 25, 2021
Position: Support

The Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council (DD Council) is an independent, public policy organization that works to improve policies, programs and services that support people with developmental disabilities and their families in our communities. The DD Council is led by people with developmental disabilities and their families. From that perspective, **the DD Council supports HB 656** which requires, that an early voting site be within 500 feet of fixed route transportation stop.

WHY is this legislation important?

- One of the most cited barriers for people with developmental disabilities in achieving full participation in community life is the availability, accessibility, and reliability of transportation.
- Fixed route transit, when available, makes full participation more possible.
- Voting is a fundamental right that Maryland's citizens with developmental disabilities want and need to participate in.
- All of Maryland's voters must be able to access their fundamental right to vote simply.
- There can be many barriers to voting for a person with a disability, access to the ballot by fixed route transit reduces those barriers significantly.
- Helps ensure compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Help America Vote Act.

WHAT does this legislation do?

- In a county that has fixed-route public transportation service – that each early voting center be located not more than 500 feet from a public transportation station or stop.

The additional access to the ballot afforded by HB 656 is essential so people with developmental disabilities maintain their fundamental right to vote.

Contact: Keith Walmsley, Director of Public Policy Initiatives
kwalmsley@md-council.org

HB 656- Election Law - Early Voting Center- Public

Uploaded by: White, Kadi-Ann

Position: FAV

March 25, 2021

Testimony on HB 656
Election Law - Early Voting Centers - Accessibility by Public Transportation
Education, Health & Environmental Affairs

Position: Favorable

Common Cause Maryland is in support of HB 656 which would require that early voting centers be located near a public transportation station or stop.

Early voting was established to drive participation and make voting more convenient. While the program has been a success and has seen a surge in the number of Marylanders voting early, we are leaving those with tight work schedules and family obligations behind. This legislation would provide individuals easy access to early voting sites, eliminating the barrier of transportation for many voters.

Pew Research Center found that out of the registered voters who did not vote in 2016, 14% cited being busy or conflicting schedule, 12% were ill or disabled, 8% were out of town or away from home, 3% had transportation problems, and 2% cited inconvenient hours or polling places.

During the 2018 gubernatorial general election, more people voted than ever before with early voting more than doubling compared to turnout in 2014. This was also the case during the 2020 general election where even with the increase in mail voting, those choosing to vote in-person did so during the early voting period. But even with the increase in early voting, Maryland needs to ensure those locations are accessible to all eligible voters. HB 656 aims to do just that by requiring early voting centers be placed near public transportation stations or stops. This increase accessibility will build on the success of the program, helping to improve participation throughout the state.

We need to do everything we can to remove barriers to exercising the right to vote. HB 656 would help to do that by ensuring all voters are provided with better access to early voting locations.

We urge a favorable report.

Testimony_TAM HB 656 Election Law – Early Voting C

Uploaded by: Costello, Christopher

Position: UNF



Transportation Association of Maryland

March 25, 2021

OPPOSE

HB 656

Election Law – Early Voting Centers – Bus Stops

The Transportation Association of Maryland is a 501(c)(3) organization representing 104 member organizations and 20,000+ individual members. TAM is the legislative voice and vigilant eyes and ears of the transportation industry in Maryland. TAM's mission is to strengthen community transportation in Maryland through advocacy and professional development.

TAM members provide Locally Operated Transit Services (LOTS) that are funded by federal state and local grants and charged with the responsibility of providing an array of public transportation services that include fixed route bus and paratransit services, which expand as new needs arise and the population increases, ages, and expands.

What has not increased over the last 20 years has been the state and federal funding needed to provide the additional and expanding needs of the population in the areas where the LOTS provide transportation services. The requirement in HB 656 to alter fixed routes and add additional, special stops for early voting locations during elections is a perfect example of why the demands on LOTS continually exceeds available resources.

While the position of my client is in opposition to HB 656, the LOTS sincerely believe their purpose is to serve the transportation needs of the people in the community and appreciate the importance of ensuring that every voter is allowed the opportunity to vote.

LOTS have been doing and will continue to do whatever is reasonable and practical to assist voters with transportation needed to reach the polls, including paratransit services for Americans with Disabilities Act eligible voters to and from the polls on election days.

Notwithstanding the Fiscal Note, details about how HB 656 would be implemented are hard to envision. The number and location of many early voter locations are yet to be determined and may not be precisely known until close to the election. That information must be provided to the LOTS in sufficient time to allow them to plan how the buses can deviate from the fixed routes to reach the early voting centers, safely discharge, and board passengers without disrupting traffic or creating a traffic hazard.



Transportation Association of Maryland

Pg. 2 of 2) OPPOSE HB 656 Election Law – Early Voting Centers – Bus Stops

This will not just be a matter of coordinating efforts between the LOTS and Public Works or State Highway Administration, although those departments will likely be involved. It will primarily be a coordinated effort between LOTS and the local board of elections in each of 24 jurisdictions.

As indicated in the letter from Mr. Duklewski, the Executive Director of TAM, there are unintended consequences that might result from even one deviation from any fixed route bus on any given day to an early voting center. Many people who ride on fixed route buses need to get from “Point A” to “Point B” at a predictable time. A 20 - 30-minute delay in a bus schedule to visit several early voting centers can seriously disrupt the life of someone who needs to arrive at work on time, or keep a doctor’s appointment, or pick up their child at day care, or a make a scheduled train connection, etc.

To provide special buses for this purpose would be prohibitively expensive for LOTS and a waste of taxpayer dollars.

As indicated above, LOTS lack sufficient drivers and vehicles required to provide all the services that are demanded in the areas they currently serve. We need to consider that it is highly unlikely that there would be enough registered voters interested in such a service that would ever justify such an expense.

The best solution for all concerned, and likely the least expensive, would be for the local board of elections to provide a taxi service, or ridesharing service trips (such as UBER or LYFT) between the early voting centers and fixed route bus stops. This would only be available to individuals who cannot access a fixed route that stops within 500 feet of an early voting center.

This solution would serve those individuals who need transportation to and from early voting centers that are determined to be too far from a fixed route bus, without creating an expensive logistical problem for LOTS or possibly disrupt the lives of everyone else who rides the bus.

My client sincerely hopes that Committee will review this information and consider their concerns. If you vote to pass HB 656, the LOTS will make every reasonable and practical effort to provide the transportation that the legislation requires; however, they do ask that the committee monitor this issue and allow for it be revisited at a future date should unreasonable financial and/or logistical complications arise.

Sincerely,
Christopher B. Costello
410-746-3452

Oppose_HB 656 Election Law – Early Voting Centers

Uploaded by: Duklewski, John

Position: UNF



Gary Blazinsky
President
Harford Transit LINK

Jeff Barnett
Vice President
Charles County VanGO

Rob Hart
Treasurer
Worcester County COA

Suzanne Kalmbacher
Secretary
Cecil County Transit

Laura Bristow
Director
Action in Maturity

Jodi Glock
Director
Harford Transit LINK

Rick Gordon
Director
City of Annapolis DOT

Semia Hackett
Director
Prince George's County DPW&T

Dorothy Hersey
Director
Towson University

Will Kenlaw
Director
Montgomery County Transit

Jim Martin
Director
American Bus Sales

D'Andrea Walker
Director
Baltimore County DPW

Travis Johnston
Ex-Officio
Maryland Transit Administration

John Duklewski
Executive Director

March 23, 2021

Hon. Paul G. Pinsky
Chairman

Senate Education, Health, & Environmental Affairs Committee
2 West, Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

OPPOSE - HB 656

Election Law – Early Voting Centers – Bus Stops

Dear Chairman Pinsky,

On behalf of the Transportation Association of Maryland (TAM), we wish to notify the Senate Education, Health, & Environmental Affairs Committee of our **OPPOSITION** for **HB 656 - Election Law – Early Voting Centers – Bus Stops**.

The Transportation Association of Maryland is a 501(c)(3) organization representing 104+ member organizations and 20,000+ individual members. TAM is the legislative voice and vigilant eyes and ears of the transportation industry in Maryland. TAM's mission is to strengthen community transportation in Maryland through advocacy and professional development.

TAM members' bus routes are scientifically planned to service our customers in the most efficient and safe manner possible. Timings are precise down to the minute in an effort to provide the greatest possible time-on-target service and reliability. Many of our agencies use timed transfers between routes. Adding additional stops that could require our member agencies to deviate up to one mile from the normal route could impose cascading service disruptions and delays. These delays can be magnified by the location of these early voting locations if they require excessive left turns, have small entrances not suited for large buses, or are situated in heavy traffic urban environments.

Seemingly small changes can result in major delays for our other customers, whose needs will continue during any early voting period. Additionally, this bill mandates service during hours when certain routes may not be in operation, or when the entire service may be out of operation as is often the case on weekends and evenings. Federal regulation regarding the permissibility of deviated routes may also run afoul of this proposed legislation. Many transit agencies will not be able to provide this service at all.

We believe a better solution to early voting center access is for counties to arrange for taxi service or ridesharing trips that would make these centers more accessible for all.

For these reasons, TAM respectfully requests a unfavorable vote on HB 656.

Sincerely,

John Duklewski, Executive Director

TRANSPORTATION
ASSOCIATION
of MARYLAND



e: tam@taminc.org

p: 410-553-4245

w: www.taminc.org

HB0656 - MTA - Election Law - Early Voting Centers

Uploaded by: Westervelt, Patricia

Position: INFO



Larry Hogan
Governor
Boyd K. Rutherford
Lt. Governor
Gregory Slater
Secretary

March 25, 2021

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

Re: Letter of Information – House Bill 656 – Election Law – Early Voting Centers – Bus Stops

Dear Chair Pinsky and Committee Members:

The Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) takes no position on House Bill 656 but offers the following information for the committee's consideration.

As amended, House Bill 656 requires, to the maximum extent practicable, any bus in Baltimore City or County funded or operated by the Maryland Transit Administration (MTA) – excluding Commuter Bus Routes – to allow passengers to embark and disembark at early voting centers within a half mile of a fixed route during the times the voting centers are open.

While MTA appreciates the intent of House Bill 656, there are numerous legal and operational challenges that would have to be overcome for implementation, including several concerns addressing the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). For instance, while the altered service is in operation, MTA's MobilityLink paratransit service area could be required to be expanded to include a ¾-mile buffer beyond the deviated route, as opposed to the federally required ¾ mile buffer beyond the regular fixed-route, due to the route being diverted by up to ½ mile. In addition to route considerations, accommodations (such as a place to deploy a ramp, curbing, or sidewalks) may need to be made at the voting center stops in order to be ADA compliant.

Secondly, there is a potential impact on existing riders, bus operator work assignments, and overall system reliability. The deviations prescribed in the bill will impact any rider on that specific deviated segment, which in turn, will add to the rider's overall travel time. Moreover, due to text stating MTA shall "allow passengers to embark/disembark," it is unclear whether MTA would be required to deviate all trips from 8:00am to 8:00pm, or only upon request. This uncertainty could cause severe logistical issues that would negatively impact service reliability, as well as conflict with operator schedules and required break times.

Finally, the legislation as written does not exempt MTA's Express Bus service from the requirement to deviate from its intended route. Currently, Express Bus routes operate with limited stops and are intended to be utilized for commuters traveling long distances. Deviating these Express Bus routes from their intended purpose would negate the shorter travel times from which Express Bus riders benefit.

The Maryland Department of Transportation respectfully requests that the committee consider this information when deliberating House Bill 656.

Respectfully submitted,

Dave Myers
Director of Government Affairs
Maryland Transit Administration
410-767-0820

Melissa Einhorn
State Legislative Officer
Maryland Department of Transportation
410-865-1102