

February 2, 2021

Testimony on HB 515
Real Property – Candidates – Access to Apartment Buildings
Environment & Transportation

Position: Favorable

Common Cause Maryland supports HB 515 which would create a process that provides candidates with limited access to apartment buildings in order to distribute campaign material and assist with voter education.

The ability to have reliable access to voters is important for candidates as the success of their efforts is determined entirely by voter turnout. When there are measures in place that limit the accessibility of voters to candidates, a void is created. Candidates are left without the ability to connect with members of the community on a personal level. Many of the opinions that are shared by humans today are developed through interactions with other people, particularly face-to-face conversations.

Vox Media noted that one of the most effective ways to influence voter turnout is through high quality face-to-face conversations. They expounded on this opinion by quoting a series of 1998 field experiments done by two professors by the names of Alan Gerber and Don Green. In their randomized experiments, the professors assigned voters with different inducements to vote. There are namely postcards, phone calls, a visit from a canvasser and nothing. The experiment concluded that an alarming 20% of voters were more likely to vote than the other methods tested. With this in mind, it is important for apartment buildings to give permission to candidates and canvassers to engage with members of the voting population.

In addition to this, more Americans are living in apartment buildings than in the past. The Pew Research Center in their analysis of the U.S. Census Bureau's housing data found that the number of households renting their home rose from 31.2% of households in 2006 to 36.6% in 2016. To add to this data, the Baltimore Sun also quoted a noteworthy finding based on its evaluation of an analysis of the U.S. Census Bureau data, stating that certain demographic groups such as young adults, nonwhites and those less educated were seen to occupy apartment buildings more than their counterparts. In a like manner, 52.5% of Baltimoreans lived in rental properties in 2016 contrary to the 45.5%, a decade earlier in 2006. Taking this into consideration, the passing of this bill would help to ensure that candidates can have meaningful conversation with all of their constituents and voters in apartments buildings would be able to form a more personal bond with candidates.

HB 515 ensures voters have access to information not only to information on the candidates seeking to represent them, but also provides the opportunity for meaningful engagement.

We urge a favorable report.