



February 4, 2021

Chairwoman Dolores G. Kelley
Finance Committee
3 East
Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Dear Chairwoman Kelley:

On behalf of EveryDistrict Action Fund, I am proud to provide this written testimony in **SUPPORT** of SB 158 Election Law - Time Off for Employee Voting being heard before the Senate Finance Committee today.

EveryDistrict Action Fund is a 501(c)(4) organization focused on advancing voting rights issues in states across the country. In March 2019, we published our *Blue States Report*, which documented how legislatures can advance voting rights reform on pressing issues like increasing early voting, reducing voter waiting times, and expanding access to mail-in voting. We work to make voting easier and fairer for more people.

Maryland should be applauded for its progress in many areas of voting rights reform. This legislation would meaningfully strengthen the paid time off for voting provisions already enshrined in law. The current COVID-19 crisis has reinforced and expanded our understanding of who constitutes an “essential worker.” From medical professionals to service employees, Marylanders across the state are working long hours and have limited time off. Their need to provide for their family and to meet our society’s needs should not be a hindrance for them expressing themselves at the ballot box. This legislation would give employees the power and opportunity to make sure their voice is heard by broadening the paid time off benefit and protecting employees from retaliation.

Our nationwide research has identified other states across the country that provide strong paid time off for voting protections, including California, Colorado, Hawaii, Illinois, Massachusetts, Nevada, and New York. Based on our evaluation, the reforms in SB 158 would make Maryland a **leader** in permitting appropriate time off for voters. As more voters choose to vote early, paid time off policies should be updated to allow them to vote when most convenient. The events of the past few weeks reinforce the need for a strengthened democracy that allows everyone’s voice to be heard and vote to be counted. We thank Delegate Palakovich Carr and Senator Lee for their leadership and respectfully request that the Committee advance this legislation.

While I am not able to attend today's hearing, I would be happy to answer any questions that the Chairwoman or Committee may have regarding our voting rights research. Thank you for your consideration of this important bill.

Sincerely,

Nicole Hobbs
Executive Director, EveryDistrict Action Fund
Nicole@everydistrict.us