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**SB 525**

February 18, 2021

**TO:** Members of the Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee

**FROM:** Natasha Mehu, Director of Government Relations

**RE:** SENATE BILL 525 – Baltimore City - Centralized Booking Facility -  
Voting Information and Early Voting Polling Place

**POSITION: SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS**

Chair Pinksy, Vice Chair Kagan, and members of the committee please be advised that the Baltimore City Administration (BCA) **supports with amendments** Senate Bill (SB) 525.

SB 525 seeks to provide inmates at the Baltimore City Centralized Booking Facility with increased access to voting materials and voting booths. It would require the local board of elections in partnership with the state board of elections to (1) provide written information regarding voting eligibility and instructions for dissemination to those in detention, and to (2) set up an early voting center at the Baltimore City Centralized Booking Facility.

It is critically important to ensure all individuals, whether or not they are held in a detention facility, are provided with the opportunity to exercise their right to vote. The BCA supports that principle, however, we urge caution and offer amendments to ensure that those goals are achieved while avoiding logistical and cost challenges for implementation that might undermine its success.

After detailed consultation with the sponsor, the City's Board of elections and Department of Finance, the BCA supports amendments requiring an election drop box be placed at the Baltimore City Centralized Booking Facility instead of an early voting

center. This would ensure that inmates have an opportunity to exercise their right vote via absentee ballot on site and in a timely manner for the election.

The amendments avoid the significant operational and cost problems establishing an early voting center at the facility presents. These broadly include issues with ensuring the inmates have proper IDs for voter registration, navigating their detention terms for each inmate, navigating the detention center procedures for cell block, ensuring all the proper ballot information is on hand given the wide range of precincts in or outside the City the inmates may come from, purchasing the necessary voting equipment for the new site, equipping the site with internet connectivity for the machines, and hiring additional election judges to work at the facility.

As inmates at the facility are there pretrial their terms for staying can be as short as a few hours or as long as over a dozen months. These individuals may receive the early voting center information but no longer be present in the jail to vote when the early voting day comes. Furthermore, as some may lack state ID they may not be eligible to register. Given the security at the facility, additional steps would have to be taken to establish an order a manner for each inmate to vote in person. Finally, the costs for opening up an early voting center can be significant. Upwards of \$100,000 or more depending on the duration of the center, the number of machines, staff, and other needs for a site. As the machines are required to run on a network they would need internet access to function further increasing costs if such access would need to be established.

The BCA is thankful for the ability to work with the sponsor to address our concerns in a way that ensures voting access for inmates can be achieved via a drop box while avoiding logistical and financial pitfalls that would make an early voting center prohibitive. Therefore, the BCA respectfully requests a **favorable with amendments** report on Senate Bill 525.