

February 16, 2021

Testimony on HB 745
Election Law - Early Voting Centers - Number Required
Ways and Means

Position: Favorable

Common Cause Maryland supports HB 745 which would alter the number of early voting centers required in certain jurisdictions, helping to provide greater access to early voting for growing communities throughout the state.

During the 2018 gubernatorial general election, more people voted than ever before with early voting more than doubling compared to turnout in 2014. Early voting turnout remained high even in a pandemic during the 2020 general election and we support increasing the number of available locations as the program grows more popular.

In 2020, voters and elected leadership in Montgomery County advocated for an additional early voting site. While the specific location was a point of contention, an additional early voting site in an area like White Oak would help to eliminate the long commute and overall lack of access to voting in that area. White Oak voters reported having to rely on public transit that takes over 41 minutes to get to the closest site, with public transit being limited or unavailable on weekends. The barriers mentioned have a disparate impact on the elderly, disabled folks, people of color, and the immigrant community.

The new formula in HB 745 would allow Montgomery County to establish two additional early voting locations, with the local board of elections hopefully placing one of these sites in White Oak. The new formula would also provide other jurisdictions with a growing number of voters to increase their locations.

While HB 745 would provide Montgomery County additional locations, it does not address the request for an additional location in Baltimore City where 12 out of 15 members of the City Council supported a resolution to increase their number of sites to eight. We urge the committee to consider allowing for that additional location.

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 could get more participation with an equitable placement of early voting sites.

We need to do everything we can to remove barriers to exercising the right to vote. HB 745 aims to do that, and we urge a favorable report.