

Maryland PIRG

Testimony for HB1005

Ways and Means Committee

Tuesday, Feb. 23, 2021

Election Law - Early Voting Centers - Number Required

Maryland PIRG is a state based, non-partisan, citizen funded public interest advocacy organization with grassroots members across the state and a student funded, student directed chapter at the University of Maryland College Park. For forty five years we've stood up to powerful interests whenever they threaten our health and safety, our financial security, or our right to fully participate in our democratic society.

We support HB 1005 to increase the number of early voting centers that Maryland counties are required to establish. Early voting centers play a crucial role in our elections, with [36 million people voting at an early voting site in 2020](#). Increasingly, voters across Maryland are opting to cast their ballots not on Election Day itself, but in the days before. In 2020, [nearly 1 million Marylanders voted in person at an early voting site](#).

For many Marylanders, early voting centers provide necessary flexibility for those who have work or other obligations on Election Day, and research shows that [additional early voting sites lead to increased turnout](#).

In the 2020 presidential election, Maryland saw [long lines at many of these voting centers](#). While the dramatic increase in early voting was largely due to COVID-19, there have often been long lines at early voting sites because there are far fewer early voting sites than Election Day precinct sites. As early voting turnout increases, we should ensure Marylanders can vote without having to wait an hour or more to vote - whether it's due to work, childcare, or any number of factors, long lines are a preventable barrier to voting.

We've also submitted testimony in support of HB 745, a similar bill that also increases the number of early voting centers that Maryland countries are required to have. Generally, people should have more access to early voting options in order to boost voter participation.

We respectfully request a favorable report.