

January 19, 2021

Testimony on HB 398
Election Law - Time off for Employee Voting
Ways and Means

Position: Favorable

Common Cause Maryland supports HB 398 which would improve upon the requirement that employers allow employees two hours off of work to vote in elections. What differentiates this bill from prior efforts requiring employers to allow employees time off to vote is the accommodation for early voting and same-day registration voting reforms.

It is important that employees get time off to vote when their work schedule does not naturally allow for time for employees to make it to the polls. Inflexible work schedule is a common barrier to voting. Thankfully, in Maryland, we require employers allow time off for their employees to vote. However, current law allows for two hours off only on Election Day and only if the employee claims to be registered to vote. The current law does not allow employees to take advantage of two of Maryland's most important and equitable voting programs.

Early voting is supposed to allow for more flexibility to vote in elections, and yet, people who have to work can only take advantage of time off on election day. Similarly, same-day registration allows voters who are not yet registered a chance to participate in our elections by allowing them to register up until the actual election is over. However, people who have to work will not be able to take advantage of this opportunity if they have to be registered beforehand to get time off.

This bill makes common sense updates so more eligible Marylanders can register, vote and have their voices heard. Voting should be accessible for all eligible voters, even if they have some restrictions due to their work schedule. Voting is a fundamental right. We must ensure that our elections are free and fair— while also working to make voting more accessible so every eligible Marylander can make their voice heard.

We urge a favorable report on HB 398.