



TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE

HB 955 – Election Law – Absentee Ballot Delivery and Marking

POSITION: Support

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The League of Women Voters of Maryland believes our election system should be accessible, fair, secure, and fiscally responsible. HB 955 can help achieve those goals. By ensuring that electronic delivery of ballots is available to people who need it — UOCAVA voters, the disabled, and others — accessibility and fairness are preserved. Reserving this option for those groups will mean fewer concerns about ballot security and processing expenses.

Internet-delivered ballots need to be manually duplicated at the local Board of Elections on SBE-approved, scannable ballots by bipartisan teams of canvass workers. This extra step is time-consuming and potentially compromises accuracy and security. Normally, though, there are relatively few ballots in this category. In the 2016 Presidential General Election, approximately 87,000 ballots statewide were sent out via the internet; for the 2018 Gubernatorial General Election the number was around 56,000. For the 2020 Presidential General Election, however, there were close to 164,000 requests for internet-delivered ballots — a huge increase.

In the 2020 elections, many voters worried about receiving their ballot on time via the postal service and chose electronic delivery instead, without realizing the implications. Unrestricted availability of internet-delivered ballots placed an enormous processing burden on the local Boards of Elections and slowed the completion of the canvass. The tremendous increase in volume necessitated the hiring of extra canvassers. In addition, social distancing guidelines meant these canvassers couldn't work side by side to duplicate and double-check the voter-printed ballots, so additional workspace in secure facilities had to be arranged.

Every voter who truly requires electronic delivery of ballots should be able to get it, and this option should be as secure, private, and accessible as possible. Other voters should use the traditional options of voting in person or requesting a ballot by mail. This will avoid overloading the Boards of Elections, slowing down the canvass, and incurring extra expenses.

The League of Women Voters of Maryland, with 1,500 members across the state, urges a favorable report on HB 955.