

Maryland PIRG

**Testimony for HB1048
Ways and Means Committee
Tuesday, Feb. 23, 2021
Election Law - Permanent Absentee Ballot List**

POSITION: FAVORABLE

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 HB1048 to create a permanent absentee ballot list for Maryland voters. Voters should be able to apply to be on a permanent mail-in ballot list so that they will receive a ballot in the mail for every upcoming election without having to fill out paperwork every year. This legislation means that elderly people, people with disabilities, and people who know they'll vote by mail don't have to fill out the same form for every election. It's more efficient for voters and elections administrators and will reduce the likelihood of voters missing the deadline to do so.

It is unnecessary for elderly people and people with disabilities who can't make it to the polls to have to request an absentee ballot every year. That's resulted in [a significant voter participation gap between people with and without disabilities](#). And with Maryland's "no-excuse" vote by mail system, all voters who want to join a permanent absentee ballot list should be able to.

Requiring someone who wants to vote to fill out a new mail-in ballot request every year means multiple additional steps in the voting process, knowing specific deadlines, and increased cost to voters and the state.

Permanent absentee voting lists work in other places. Five states, as well as Washington D.C., have already implemented permanent mail-in ballot lists, and several other states have these lists for voters with permanent disabilities and/or senior voters as well. Additionally, a study of San Diego County found that [a permanent absentee voting list increased both voter turnout and the likelihood that voters will participate in the next election](#).

We respectfully request a favorable report.

Rishi Shah, Maryland PIRG Associate
rshah@marylandpirg.org