

February 16, 2021

Testimony on HB 895
Election Law - Polling Places at Continuing Care Retirement Communities
Ways and Means

Position: Favorable

Common Cause Maryland supports HB 895 which would require local boards of elections to establish separate precincts in continuing care retirement communities of 200 or more upon request.

Voting should be accessible for all eligible citizens. Allowing some retirement communities to request a polling place will eliminate many of the burdens that discourage voters from voting, creating greater accessibility and equity in our elections.

In the 2016 presidential election, for example, 71 percent of Americans over the age of 65 voted, compared with 46 percent among 18- to 29-year-olds, according to U.S. Census Bureau data. People over the age of 65 continue to show up at the polls far more than any other age group. Additionally, the number of voters who fall into the category of “older” keeps rising. Older people are more likely to view voting as a responsibility and to care about a broad range of issues. Older citizens also tend to be more connected to their communities, which makes them more likely to vote.

Even when offered mail-in ballots, many older Americans prefer voting in person. Eligible voters should be provided every opportunity to exercise their civic duty and have their voice heard in our democracy. Providing polling places to retirement homes would make the voting process more convenient for older voters who wish to vote in person, particularly for those with scheduling and transportation challenges. Additionally, long waiting lines are a burden for older voters and can be avoided for those living in retirement centers if a polling place is provided.

We encourage a favorable report.