



House Bill 895

Election Law – Polling Places at Continuing Care Retirement Communities

MACo Position: **OPPOSE**

To: Ways and Means Committee

Date: February 16, 2021

From: Kevin Kinnally

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **OPPOSES** HB 895. This bill would mandate that local boards of elections establish voting precincts in any continuing care retirement community that requests a separate polling place for its residents.

HB 895 places a substantial administrative and cost burden onto local boards of elections, whose functions are supported by county funding. Without state resources to offset these potentially large costs, the bill represents an unfunded mandate on local governments.

Local boards of elections, working in concert with community organizations, regularly conduct voter outreach campaigns in order to extend voting franchise as widely as possible to eligible voters. These programs, combined with Maryland's effort to offer and promote early voting and the "absentee on demand" option, provide voters with a variety of options to exercise their voting privilege.

As a rule, MACo resists state policies that trigger costly or burdensome local implementation. Providing additional precinct locations entails substantial costs for equipment purchases/leases, equipment storage and transportation, staff compensation and training, and other overhead. These costs are nearly fully borne by the county governments.

Under state law, counties have no choice but to fund these costs – competing for limited local funds against public health, schools, public safety, roadway maintenance, and other essential public services.

This bill would place a mandate on county governments to carry out new state policy. Counties would prefer that local boards of elections retain flexibility and discretion in designating polling places to best serve community needs. Accordingly, MACo urges the Committee to issue an **UNFAVORABLE** report on HB 895 and leave these matters in the hands of local elections officials.