

Maryland PIRG

Testimony for SB683

Ways and Means Committee

Tuesday, March 30th, 2021

Election Law - Voting - Permanent Absentee Ballot List, Ballot Drop Boxes, and Report

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 SB683 to create a permanent absentee ballot list and bring ballot drop boxes.

Permanent Mail-In Ballot List: This committee and the House voted favorably on HB1048, which would create a permanent mail-in ballot list. We hope that the committee will continue to support this concept.

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](#).

Ballot Drop Boxes: This committee and the House voted favorably on HB1047, which would continue the usage of ballot drop boxes in future elections. We hope that the committee will continue to support this concept.

SB683 was amended in the Senate to bring back ballot drop boxes for use in future elections. Ballot drop boxes should be placed throughout the state in advance of each election. They are [safe](#) and [secure](#) ways for voters to return their mail-in ballots, and they're popular with voters. [Over one million Maryland voters used dropboxes](#) in the November general election.

Drop boxes allow voters who are concerned about postmarking their ballot by the deadline to submit their ballots safely. Voters who received their mail-in ballot late, fear their ballot will be tampered with, or don't trust the postal system can use drop boxes to vote confidently. Since Maryland's mail in voting envelopes are postage paid, drop boxes also [save local governments significant amounts of money](#) because return postage is not required.

We respectfully request a favorable report.