

March 2, 2021

Testimony on HB 1145
Election Law - Absentee Ballots - Requests and Signature Verification
Ways and Means

Position: Unfavorable

Common Cause Maryland opposes HB 1145 which would require more stringent proof of identification and signature requirements for mail-in voting, effectively shutting qualified voters out of our election process.

It's important to note that legislation of this nature aims to solve an issue that doesn't exist – voter fraud. In myriad studies over the past 20 years, virtually no voter fraud was found. The risk of disenfranchisement is far greater than the evidence of voter fraud in Maryland. Studies have further shown that, in jurisdictions where these needless policies have been enacted, there has been a significant negative impact on the ability of countless eligible voters to have their voices heard.

Maryland already requires a citizen to swear, under penalty of perjury, that he or she is a citizen when registering to vote. Adding new documentation requirements threatens to slow down the ballot request process for registered voters and make it impossible for our most vulnerable populations to engage in their civic rights. Those without ID are disproportionately likely to be Black, Latino, low-income voters, young adults, senior citizens, and people with disabilities. For many of these eligible voters, it is no simple matter to obtain the necessary ID and, in some cases, impossible.

Signature verification, as we see in other states, has the potentials to disenfranchise marginalized populations throughout the state – including voters with disabilities, voters whose first language is not English, elderly voters, young voters, transgenders voters, and more. A voter's signature can change for a numerous reason and it is likely that their signature will look different from that used when first registering to vote.

Common Cause Maryland supports a robust, secure election system that encourages the maximum participation among voters in the state. HB 1145 does nothing to advance those goals and would likely significantly impede them. For those reasons, we urge the committee to give HB 1145 an unfavorable report.