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**HB493: Election Law - Voting Locations -  
Accessibility by Public Transportation and Voters With Disabilities  
Ways and Means Committee  
February 2, 2021**

**Position: Support**

The Arc Maryland is a statewide advocacy organization dedicated to the rights and quality of lives of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families. We support HB 493, and commend the sponsor, as well as several other members of the general assembly, who have noted barriers to equitable voting for people with disabilities and have presented legislation this session to address and remove them.

People with intellectual and developmental disabilities relied heavily on early and absentee/ballot box voting during the presidential election. Having greater access to these voting options improved participation of people with disabilities in the election, without a doubt, but that participation was not without barriers such as the locations and placements of ballot boxes and polling places.

Many ballot boxes were placed in such a way that there was not room for a person in a wheelchair to pass, turn, and exit away from the box. Some boxes were within a great distance from curb cuts or were on the edge of a step or curb, positioned in such a way that a person in a wheelchair would be unable to submit their ballot.

**HB 493 would require that each ballot drop box shall be placed in a manner that is accessible to voters with disabilities, including voters with disabilities who use wheelchairs.**

According to the U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration, 2017 National Household Travel Survey, people age 18 to 64 with disabilities are less likely to own or have access to vehicles than people without disabilities.<sup>i</sup> According to this same survey, people with disabilities are also less likely to drive, even if they have vehicles. Over 91.7% of people drive vehicles if they do not have disabilities, but only 60.4% drive if they do. Many people with disabilities, who don't own or drive a car, are reliant on public transportation to get around.

**HB493 would require local boards to prioritize the locations of polling places and ballot drop boxes to ensure there are locations that are not more than 500 feet from a public transportation station or stop.**

We believe these changes will not present additional costs to the state but will create dramatic improvements to access for voters with and without disabilities, as these changes will improve access for all. For these reasons, The Arc Maryland urges the committee to return a favorable report on HB493.

Sincerely,

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<sup>i</sup> SOURCE: U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration, 2017 National Household Travel Survey. <https://www.bts.gov/topics/passenger-travel/travel-patterns-american-adults-disabilities>