

March 30, 2021

Testimony on SB 683
Election Law - Permanent Absentee Ballot List
Ways and Means

Position: Favorable

Common Cause Maryland supports SB 683 which would provide eligible voters seeking to use the mail-in voting process the opportunity to opt into a permanent list where ballots are automatically for each election.

Maryland, like many states, offers “no excuse” absentee or mail-in ballots, meaning that eligible voters can receive a mail-in ballot without having to provide a reason. This level accessibility to our elections has proven to be a vital program for many voters, including voters with disabilities and voters confined to their place of residence for other varying reasons, but should be improved to create greater convenience for those needing to utilize the program the most.

Currently, eligible voters have to request a mail-in ballot for each election. This requirement is confusing and an unnecessary barrier for voters who need to regularly vote by mail. Many may miss the mail-in ballot request deadline or don’t realize they have to request to receive their ballot by mail for the entire election cycle, leaving them at risk of not being able to participate in the election.

SB 683 aims to streamline the process so eligible voters can request their mail-in ballot and opt into receiving future ballots automatically by mail. Eligible voters choosing to opt into the permanent list are provided with the opportunity to update their information or opt out.

According to NCSL, five states allow any eligible voter to opt into a permanent mail-in voting list: Arizona, California, Minnesota, Montana, New Jersey, and the District of Columbia. Implementation of this program in these states has created greater convenience as voters no longer have to request a ballot multiple times per year, cut costs as the need for processing ballot requests is greatly reduced, and helps to increase overall participation.

Updated Suggested Amendments: While we appreciate the effort to increase participation by mailing ballot request forms, we’re concerned it may cause confusion for voters who have opted into the permanent mail-in voting list. It should be clear that those voters will not be mailed an application. We also recommend making clear that drop boxes should be ADA compliant.

SB 683 improves overall accessibility to our elections for voters needing to use the mail-in voting process the most. We urge a favorable report.