



NATIONAL FEDERATION  
OF THE BLIND  
MARYLAND

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**Subject:** Favorable with Amendment HB1047  
**To:** House Ways and Means Committee  
**From:** Members of the National Federation of the Blind of Maryland  
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The Members of the National Federation of the Blind of Maryland urge the House Ways and Means Committee to vote in favor of HB1047, a bill concerning absentee ballots and ballot drop boxes. We recommend one small amendment to clarify the intent of the bill.

Amendment 1: on page 8, line 16, add the word “accessible” in front of “online portal.” The insertion of the word “accessible” will not only ensure that voters with disabilities can use the portal, but also will make it easier for all voters to navigate the website. This amendment will advance the goals of this important bill.

The Mail-In Voting Enhancement Act is a fitting title for this legislation. For instance, on page 4, lines 6-8, the bill reads, “THE STATE BOARD SHALL ENSURE THAT BALLOT DROP BOXES ARE: COMPLIANT WITH THE FEDERAL AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT.” This stipulation in the bill is very important because blind voters are entitled access to the same information that the rest of the public has. If there is a printed sign stating that this object is a ballot drop box, then according to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), there must also be a tactile, embossed print, or Braille sign stating the same information. Blind voters need an independent way of verifying that they are dropping their ballot in the right place. Compliance with the ADA will achieve this goal.

The bill further states on page 4, lines 13-14 and 20, “IN DETERMINING THE LOCATION OF BALLOT DROP BOXES, A LOCAL BOARD SHALL ENSURE ACCESSIBILITY BY: INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES.” This is an important feature of the bill because if ballot

boxes are not in an accessible location, voters with disabilities will be subject to unnecessary and illegal discrimination.

The members of the National Federation of the Blind of Maryland appreciate that the bill specifies multiple methods of communication between the local board of elections and the voter who is casting an absentee ballot. Allowing such methods of communication as text messages and using an accessible online portal will be very beneficial to voters with disabilities who would have difficulties with mail or in-person visits to the local board office.

Please vote in favor of HB1047. The needs of voters with disabilities must not be overlooked. The provisions of the bill concerning compliance with the ADA, the need for ballot box accessibility, and the requirement for an accessible online portal will avoid future problems and will ensure that voters with disabilities have a comparable experience to voters without disabilities.