



SIERRA CLUB
MARYLAND CHAPTER

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Testimony for HB0745

Ways and Means Committee, Tuesday, February 16, 2021

Election Law – Early Voting Centers – Number Required

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. That includes a long history of working to help people register and vote.

We support HB745 to increase the number of early voting centers that Maryland counties are required to establish. Early voting centers play a crucial role in our elections, with [36 million people voting at an early voting site in 2020](#). Increasingly, voters across Maryland are opting to cast their ballots not on Election Day itself, but in the days before. In 2020, [nearly 1 million Marylanders voted in person at an early voting site](#).

For many Marylanders, early voting centers provide necessary flexibility for those who have work or other obligations on Election Day, and research shows that [additional early voting sites lead to increased turnout](#).

In the 2020 presidential election, [Maryland saw long lines at many of these voting centers](#). While the dramatic increase in early voting was largely due to COVID-19, there have often been long lines at early voting sites because there are far fewer early voting sites than Election Day precinct sites. As early voting turnout increases, we should ensure Marylanders can vote without having to wait an hour or more to vote - whether it's due to work, childcare, or any number of factors, long lines are a preventable barrier to voting.

This legislation increases the minimum number of early voting sites in 14 counties, and does not reduce the number of sites anywhere. The bill mandates a minimum number of early voting sites per county based on each county's number of registered voters, ensuring that more Marylanders - regardless of what county they reside in - have an early voting center in a location they can conveniently access.

HB745 is a logical response to growing interest in early voting. It addresses growing concerns over long lines and limited access, and will help ensure all eligible Marylanders are able to participate in voting.

We respectfully request a favorable report.