

February 2, 2021

Testimony on HB 423
Election Law - Voting Systems - Accessibility for Voters with Disabilities
Ways and Means

Position: Unfavorable

Common Cause Maryland opposes HB 423, which would require that every early voter in Maryland use ballot marking devices.

We do not disagree with HB 423's intent, which is to help ensure the secrecy and accessibility of the vote for disabled Marylanders. We believe that further efforts should be taken to ensure these values are met. However, we believe that HB 423 goes too far to solve this problem, increasing our dependence on third party voting machine manufacturers, decreasing our election security, and potentially lessening the efficiency of our current voting processes in a way that could reduce access by increasing wait times at the polls.

Ballot marking devices are vital tools to assist certain disabled Marylanders in having their voices heard in elections. Marylanders with decreased motor functions, or limited eyesight, may find it impossible to vote on a paper ballot without assistance. While Maryland allows for this assistance, disabled Marylanders understandably prefer the secrecy and independence in their vote allowed by ballot marking devices.

However, because these devices provide unique benefits to disabled Marylanders, and there are a limited number of machines per precinct (if there is even more than one), the current system reduces secrecy for disabled Marylanders. Current law tries to alleviate this problem by allowing voters to pick their method of voting – whether it is by ballot marking device or paper ballot at the precinct. Additionally, we believe if Maryland had the opportunity to have Accessible Ballot Machines that printed ballots that looked exactly like paper ballots, that would allow Marylanders utilizing accessible ballots to maintain their privacy.

HB 423 laudably tries to alleviate this situation, but we are concerned that it goes too far. Common Cause Maryland prefers as many voters as possible vote paper ballots – they are easily auditable, clear to the voter, and while imperfect, never break down.

Because HB 423 would require all Marylanders to use ballot marking devices, we urge the committee to give an unfavorable report.