Testimony on HB 1047 and HB 1048
Permanent Absentee Ballot List and Mail-In Voting Enhancement Act
Ways and Means
Position: Favorable

Everyone Votes Maryland is a nonpartisan coalition of national, state, and grassroots organizations dedicated to ensuring that all eligible Marylanders can have their voices heard on Election Day.

During the 2020 congressional 7th District Special Election, Primary, and the General Election, we worked tirelessly to ensure that every Maryland voter was made aware of their right to vote in a process that was safe, secure, and accessible. Marylanders stepped up to meet the challenges of the pandemic election, with more than 1.3 million people voting by mail and record-breaking early turnout, and there were many lessons learned including the need to enhance our mail-in voting process. HB 1047 and HB 1048 are a direct response to these elections and provide improvements that were needed well before the pandemic.

Permanent Mail-In Ballot List
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. HB 1048 aims to streamline the process so eligible voters can request their mail-in ballot and opt into receiving future ballots automatically by mail, eliminating the risk of voters missing request deadlines or overall confusion about the process. Implementation would ensure those voters needing to use the mail-in voting process the most can easily make their voices heard in our elections.

Enhanced Ballot Tracking
Maryland voters are able to access the Voter Lookup Page to check on the status of their mail-in ballot. While this tracking system provides updates that are needed the most, it is outdated and confusing to voters. HB 1047 would shift our tracking system into the 21st-century. Once Marylanders request a mail-in ballot, they would receive up to date tracking and reminders using a communication method of their choice. This improved system would build confidence in the overall mail-in voting process.

Accessible & Secure Drop Boxes
Drop boxes provide a safe, secure, and accessible method of returning mail-in ballots. This method of delivery grew popular during the 2020 election where over a million voters selected to return their ballot using this process. HB 1047 builds on the success of that pilot program. It provides for many of the safeguards used in the 2020 election year and addresses many of the accessibility issues experienced by voters with disabilities due to poor placement of the drop boxes.

Clear Process for "Curing"
When mail-in ballots are received in a timely manner or preprocessing of ballots allowed, election officials are able to check for the presence of a signature and identify any errors with a ballot that can be "cured" by a voter. This process provides for a window of time in which voters can correct their mistakes. HB 1047 would establish a clear process that ensures Marylanders using this voting method have their voice heard in our elections and help to reduce the overall ballot rejection rates.

We collectively urge a favorable report.