



Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council

EMPOWERMENT • OPPORTUNITY • INCLUSION

Ways & Means Committee

HB493: Election Law - Voting Locations - Accessibility by Public Transportation and Voters With Disabilities

February 2, 2021

Position: Support

The Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council (DD Council) is an independent, public policy organization that works to improve policies, programs and services that support people with developmental disabilities and their families in our communities. The DD Council is led by people with developmental disabilities and their families. From that perspective, **the DD Council supports HB 493** which requires county boards give priority to placing ballot drop boxes at locations that are less than 500 feet from a public transportation, additionally, polling locations should be the same distance from transit. Finally, this bill requires that ballot drop boxes be placed in a manner that is accessible to voters with disabilities.

WHY is this legislation important?

- One of the most cited barriers for people with developmental disabilities in achieving full participation in community life is the availability, accessibility, and reliability of transportation.
- Fixed route transit, when available, makes full participation more possible.
- Voting is a fundamental right that Maryland's citizens with developmental disabilities want and need to participate in.
- All of Maryland's voters must be able to access their fundamental right to vote simply.
- There can be many barriers to voting for a person with a disability, access to the ballot by fixed route transit reduces those barriers significantly.
- Helps ensure compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Help America Vote Act.

WHAT does this legislation do?

- For counties that have fixed-route public transportation services, the local Boards of Elections must give priority to placing ballot drop boxes at locations that are not more than 500 feet from a public transportation station or stop.
- The County Board must designate polling places that are located less than 500 feet from a public transportation station or stop.
- Requires that ballot drop boxes be placed in a manner that is accessible to voters with disabilities.

The additional access to the ballot afforded by HB 493 is essential so people with developmental disabilities maintain their fundamental right to vote.

Contact: Keith Walmsley, Director of Public Policy Initiatives
kwalmsley@md-council.org