

State of Maryland

Commission on Civil Rights

“Our vision is to have a State that is free from any trace of unlawful discrimination.”



Officers

Alvin O. Gillard, Executive Director
Nicolette Young, Assistant Director
Glendora C. Hughes, General Counsel

Governor
Larry Hogan
Lt. Governor
Boyd K. Rutherford
Commission Chairperson
Gary C. Norman, Esq.
Commission Vice Chairperson
Roberto N. Allen, Esq.
Commissioners
Allison U. Dichoso, Esq.
Hayden B. Duke
Janssen E. Evelyn, Esq.
Eileen M. Levitt, SPHR, SHRM-SCP
Rabbi Binyamin Marwick
Jeff Rosen
Gina McKnight-Smith, PharmD, MBA

January 26, 2021

House Bill 57 – Voters' Rights Protection Act of 2020 **POSITION: Support**

Dear Chairperson Kaiser, Vice Chairperson Washington, and Members of the House Ways & Means Committee:

The Maryland Commission on Civil Rights (“MCCR”; “The Commission”) is the State agency responsible for the enforcement of laws prohibiting discrimination in employment, housing, public accommodations, and state contracts based upon race, color, religion, sex, age, national origin, marital status, familial status, sexual orientation, gender identity, genetic information, physical and mental disability, and source of income.

House Bill 57 authorizes local boards of election to reduce or change the locations of voting centers, under specific conditions. It also provides a mechanism for local boards of election to verify absentee ballots that return without a signature. It further requires websites and outlets that are a platform to disseminate or report election-related information to identify and report, to the State Board of Elections, any foreign actors and/or false information that is being shared on their respective platforms.

The Maryland Commission on Civil Rights supports HB57 because we believe that free, fair, and accessible elections should be a fervently protected right for all who are eligible to participate in our electoral system. With the challenges of COVID-19 having a profound impact on the 2020 elections, our state and local boards of elections undertook the task of maximizing voter participation and accessibility while mitigating the potential to place any voter unnecessarily in harm’s way. While we were fortunate that alterations to the state’s voting systems were not used for nefarious purposes, the truth cannot be said elsewhere. As was widely reported throughout 2020, there were severe allegations that jurisdictions across the country were taking advantage of the pandemic in order to engage in voter suppression – especially against minority voters in the South. Maryland should learn from the lessons of 2020, both locally and nationally, and enact meaningful reforms that protect our right to vote and participate in our democracy.

For these reasons, the Maryland Commission on Civil Rights urges a favorable report on HB57. Thank you for your time and consideration of the information contained in this letter. The Maryland Commission on Civil Rights looks forward to the continued opportunity to work with you to improve and promote civil rights in Maryland.