

January 26, 2021

Testimony on HB 355
Election Law - Registered Voter List Security and Electronic Signature Requirements for Petitions
Ways and Means

Position: Favorable

Common Cause Maryland supports HB 355, which will empower citizens by enhancing their ability to directly participate in the petition process guaranteed under the Maryland Constitution.

The petition process is an important part of Maryland's democratic government; it gives citizens the chance to have their voice heard and to bring legislative action they disagree with to the voters to decide. It is a process that deserves greater accessibility but continues to be restrictive.

The process of petitioning largely involves direct contact with Maryland voters. The methods of reaching voters typically involve canvassing at high traffic locations like metro stops and farmers markets or going door-to-door. And while petitions can be posted online, it requires proper formatting which typically comes in the form of a pdf, limiting overall usability for most voters.

This existing process creates unnecessary hurdles to an already limited tool as most voters have limited availability to interact in-person with petitioners for reasons ranging from work schedules to access to public transportation. This proves even more difficult for the voters who are confined to their place of residence.

HB 355 seeks to address this by codifying the temporary regulations adopted by the State Board of Elections (SBE) during the 2020 elections in response to COVID-19, allowing for electronic petition signatures. This temporary change which has been extended by SBE utilize the technology available to us, creating greater access to all citizens throughout the state and making the process of verifying signatures seamless for election officials.

Citizens often times feel like power is out of their hands. HB 355 is a step forward in that it helps reduce barriers that usually hinder direct participation in the petition process by voters. Public engagement in the democratic process should be encouraged, whether citizens are voting for elected officials or bringing issues to the ballot.

We urge a favorable report.