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Ways and Means Committee

Education Subcommittee

Finance Resources Subcommittee



The Maryland House of Delegates
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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

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Support HB 493 – Election Law – Voting Locations – Accessibility by Public Transportation and Voters with Disabilities

Dear Chair Kaiser and Members of the Ways and Means Committee,

Thank you for your consideration of HB 493 – Voting Locations – Accessibility by Public Transportation and Voters with Disabilities. This bill requires that in areas with fixed-route public transportation systems the boards of elections give priority to polling places, including same day, early voting and ballot drop-box locations that are accessible by public transportation. Accessibility is defined as being within 500 feet from the transportation drop-off point. In addition this bill requires that all ballot drop boxes be placed in a way that is accessible to those with disabilities, including wheelchairs.

Issues with voting accessibility rose to the surface during the 2020 election cycle. In response to many constituent concerns about lack of transportation access to proposed polling sites in Baltimore County, several of my colleagues and I sent a letter to the board of elections with suggestions of alternative sites (which had previously been utilized as polling places) that were on public transportation routes. These suggestions were ignored and in some Districts, including my own, there were NO polling places or drop-box locations accessible to public transportation, though there were approved sites available. I introduced this bill as a statewide bill after hearing of similar concerns in St. Mary's, Howard and Montgomery Counties as well.

In addition, several members of the community contacted me with concerns about the placement of ballot drop-boxes that were set up on curbs and were not accessible to those in wheelchairs. This bill requires that these be placed in a manner that can be reached by all voters.

All of us on this committee are in agreement that every legal vote should be encouraged and counted. To disenfranchise those who need public transportation and disability accommodations is contrary to the spirit civic engagement and democracy.

Sincerely,

Delegate Michele Guyton