

Maryland PIRG

Rishi Shah, Maryland PIRG Associate
Testimony for SB0596
Ways and Means Committee
Tuesday, March 23rd, 2021
Election Law – Early Voting Centers – Hours of Operation
Position: Favorable

Maryland PIRG is a non-partisan, citizen-funded public interest advocacy organization with grassroots members across the state and a student chapter at the University of Maryland College Park. For forty five years we've stood up to powerful interests whenever they threaten our health and safety, our financial security, or our right to fully participate in our democratic society. That includes a long history of working to help people register to vote and turn out.

We support SB596 requiring early voting centers to be open between 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. for early voting days in all elections. Currently, early voting centers are only required to be open from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. for non-presidential general elections and primary elections, and from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. for presidential general elections. The [House passed HB 206, the cross-file bill to SB596, by a vote of 119-11](#), and we hope you continue to support a stronger version of this legislation that changes the proposed opening time for 8 a.m. to 7 a.m.

SB596 would provide flexibility to voters in presidential primaries and midterm elections. Extending the availability of early voting by up to three hours in the morning would enable voters to more easily incorporate voting into their day. This would be especially helpful for Marylanders who face demanding work schedules or family obligations—voters for whom the current 10 a.m. opening time is inconvenient or impractical.

The 2020 election saw [long lines at many early voting centers](#). While the dramatic increase in early voting in 2020 was largely due to COVID-19, there have often been long lines at early voting sites because there are far fewer early voting sites than Election Day precinct sites. In the 2018 midterm, [voters faced lines of up to 90 minutes long](#). SB596 would help to reduce these lines, thus addressing a persistent and preventable problem in Maryland's early voting system.

SB596 represents a common-sense step towards expanding the accessibility of early voting in Maryland. The 2020 general election notwithstanding, [Maryland has seen a consistent increase in early in-person voting since 2010](#). Marylanders are increasingly turning to early voting as an alternative to voting on Election Day itself. SB596 responds to this demonstrated state-wide demand for improved access to early voting.

We respectfully request a favorable report.