



MARYLAND STATE & D.C. AFL-CIO

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HB 153 and HB 274 – Election Law – Elections by Mail House Ways and Means Committee January 26, 2021

SUPPORT

**Donna S. Edwards
President
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Madam Chair and members of the Committee thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of HB 153 and HB 274 – Election Law – Elections by Mail. My name is Donna S. Edwards, President of the Maryland State and DC AFL-CIO. On behalf of the 340,000 union members in the state of Maryland, I offer the following comments.

If the COVID-19 Pandemic has taught us anything about our elections, it is that we know we can conduct them by mail. With limited time, resources, and planning, the Maryland Board of Elections, executed exactly what is being proposed in both HB 153 and HB 274 during the Presidential Primary, albeit with some difficulties along the way. In the face of global pandemic and needing to completely change our entire Primary election process in just a matter of months, The State Boards and County Boards processed 1,215,608 Vote-By-Mail ballots in the Presidential Preference Primary race. With proper planning and enabling legislation to do so, we know that we can run our elections in Maryland by mail – allowing for those who still desire to vote in person to do so – with enormous success, and we have the proof of concept from last year.

Both bills, HB 153 and HB 274, set our election policy going forward, to provide a vote-by-mail ballot to every registered voter in Maryland. There are details that differ between them, but the overall point remains the same: We need to change our election law to provide for universal vote-by-mail, while still providing in-person voting options for those voters who choose to do so.

Ultimately, Vote-By-Mail both expands the electorate, and it is cheaper. Oregon passed a Universal Vote by Mail law in 1998, and what have they seen as a result? A decreased cost to the taxpayers and increase in voter turnout. In 1998, Oregon saw a turnout of 59%, compared with their most recent turnout for 2020 – after Vote by Mail had been fully instituted – of 78%¹.

¹ Oregon Secretary of State's Office

Additionally, Oregon has realized a 30% savings on the cost of conducting elections due to adopting Universal Vote by Mail.

Increasing the number of Marylanders who participate in our Democracy while simultaneously saving Maryland taxpayers money is win-win legislation for everyone.

We ask for a favorable report on either HB 153 or HB 274.