

Dear Members of the Ways and Means Committee,

My name is Jessica Klaitman, I am a Baltimore County resident, and a member the Everyone Votes Maryland coalition. I support the Mail-in Voting Enhancement Act (HB1047) and the Permanent Absentee Ballot List (HB1048).

I am writing on behalf of Baltimore Women United (BWU), a diverse group that educates women on important issues, engages them as voters, constituents, candidates and donors, and plans major actions to further women's equality in Baltimore and throughout Maryland. BWU conducts voter registration and voter education in Baltimore City and County.

BWU and all those invested in the democratic process know that varying voting methods and opportunities is essential to increasing voter turn-out. Data from the Maryland State Board of Elections website show that voting was up nearly 10% statewide between 2016 and 2020, even in the midst of a pandemic. This includes increases in Baltimore City and County, where many typically disenfranchised voters reside. Over 50% of Baltimore votes were by mail, as were nearly half of votes statewide.

According to data from the Maryland State Board of Elections website, over 40% of rejected mail in ballots were for signature issues, which, under HB1047, could be cured. Without ballot curing, we are disenfranchising people unnecessarily. The people being disenfranchised are those whose votes are most often lost: those who cannot leave work to go vote, those who experience voter intimidation at the polls, including Black and Brown voters, those for whom English is a challenge, among others. These voters benefit from ballot curing, drop boxes, a manageable and easily navigable ballot tracking system, and a permanent mail-in voting list. If we truly believe in democracy, we need to remove barriers and put systems in place to make voting easier and more accessible for all.

It is clear by the increase in voting that parts of our system are working. It is our job to support what works and continue to improve upon it, in the name of democracy. This includes the enhancing measures in these bills: making secure and accessible drop boxes available in each election, improving the tracking system for ballots, allowing for the curing of ballots, and establishing a permanent by-request mail-in voting list.

Baltimore Women United respectfully urges the Committee to issue favorable reports on the Mail-in Voting Enhancement Act and the Permanent Absentee Ballot List. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Jessica Klaitman
Baltimore Women United
917-783-6783