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**HOUSE WAYS & MEANS**  
**HB 1047 & 1048 : Election Law– Mail–In Voting Enhancement Act**

**February 23, 2021 1:30 p.m.**

**Position: Support**

As the designated protection and advocacy organization for Maryland and by authority of the Help America Vote Act, Disability Rights Maryland (DRM), formerly Maryland Disability Law Center, is charged with assisting persons with disabilities to participate fully in the electoral process. Pursuant to this mandate, DRM seeks to ensure election access to a wide range of individuals with disabilities, including, but not limited to, individuals with physical, cognitive, and sensory disabilities.

DRM supports HB 1047 which would require 1) accessible ballot drop boxes and 2) permanent mail-in ballot lists. After receiving reports of inaccessible ballot drop boxes during the 2020 Maryland General Election; DRM surveyed 20 ballot drop box locations in Baltimore City and Baltimore County. The most common ADA accessibility issue was the physical placement of the ballot drop boxes. Several drop boxes were flush with the curb of the school or community center where they were placed. This posed a major safety issue for individuals using wheelchairs or other walking assistance devices. In order for them to place their ballot into the drop box, they would have to be in the street with vehicles. This bill addresses many of the accessibility issues experienced by voters with disabilities faced during the 2020 general election.

Permanent mail-in voting lists have been recognized as an alternative voting method that assists increasing the turnout for voters with disabilities. Currently, 17 states permit permanent absentee voting while 19 states have provisions for notifying voters in advance about the accessibility of their assigned polling places. These measures which are designed to increase equity amongst voters have lead to increased voter participation, a hallmark of a healthy democracy.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments.

**For more information contact:**

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