

March 8, 2021

The Honorable Delegate Anne R. Kaiser
Chairwoman of the House Ways and Means Committee
House Office Building, Room 131
6 Bladen St., Annapolis, MD 21401

House Bill 1020

Madam Chair Anne R. Kaiser, Vice Chair Alonzo T. Washington, and members of the Ways and Means Committee - I join you today to express my support for House Bill 1020 and creating a curbside voting option in Maryland. As a principal author of the Americans with Disabilities Act in the U.S. Congress, my goal was always to increase the civic participation and inclusion of Americans with disabilities. Nothing is more important to civic participation than the act of voting, and breaking barriers to ballot access is an essential construct of our democracy.

House Bill 1020 will achieve this measure and increase ballot access for voters who are temporarily or permanently disabled. Many people with disabilities struggle to wait in long lines or physically navigate their polling location. An outdoor or drive-up option will provide a similar ease of voting to that experienced by other non-disabled voters while also maintaining privacy and independence – key elements to the integrity of the American voting process.

Voters with disabilities experience a wide range of access barriers in the voting process. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, we saw states and counties across the nation provide more alternative options for casting a ballot. This included additional opportunities for voting by mail and curbside or drive-up options.

A recent study from the Rutgers University School of Management and Labor Relations on disabled voter turnout in the 2020 election showed that reports of disability-related access barriers reduced from 30% in 2016 to 18% in 2020. I firmly believe the data supports the idea that this reduction is due to additional and more flexible voting options in this last election.

Additionally, the pandemic has taught us that in an unexpected crisis, all kinds of Americans can find themselves subject to disability and end up needing accommodations. The accommodation process provided in the Americans with Disability Act benefits more of us than we realize, especially in these times of need.

By providing a curbside voting option, you will be opening the gates of freedom and equity to more voters while breaking barriers to the ballot box for many types of voters, including those who are disabled, seniors, temporarily disabled and non-disabled folks in crisis. I urge you to support and vote for House Bill 1020. Thank you.

Respectfully,

Tony Coelho
DNC Disability Council Chair