



Barbara Noveau, Executive Director, DoTheMostGood

Committee: Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

Testimony on: SB0163 – Election Law – Ballots – Processing and Reporting Procedures

Position: Favorable

Hearing Date: January 26, 2022

Bill Contact: Senator Cheryl Kagan

DoTheMostGood (DTMG) is a progressive grassroots organization with more than 3000 members who live in a wide range of communities in primarily in Montgomery County, from Bethesda near the DC line north to Frederick and from Poolesville east to Silver Spring and Olney. DTMG supports legislation and activities that help ensure equity in voting, civil rights, education, and criminal justice; access to healthcare, transportation, and housing; and promote positive and trusting relationships between our communities and our state and local governments.

DTMG strongly supports SB0163 because more voters are choosing to vote by mail-in/absentee ballots. In 2020, 61% of Marylanders used this method. Immigrant, low income, and communities of color rely disproportionately on this method of voting since many of them, for a variety of reasons, find it difficult to vote in person on Election Day or during Early Voting.

It is also true that many vote-by-mail voters forget to sign the oath on their ballot envelope. Signatures on the oath are required for the ballot to be counted. These omissions are discovered by a process called canvassing the ballots. Timely canvassing and notification of the omission to the affected voters are critical to ensure their votes are counted.

SB0163 stipulates that local boards of election must notify a voter as soon as practicable but not later than 3 days after the ballot has been canvassed and found to be unsigned. The bill also stipulates that local boards may not accept, reject, open, or process any absentee ballot envelopes before 8 days prior to the first day of early voting and may not tabulate absentee ballot results before election day.

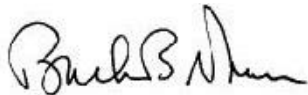
We applaud the policy that the clarity of the voter's intent is the overriding consideration in determining the validity of an absentee ballot or the vote cast, and that the regulations of the State board must reflect this.

In the same vein, we applaud the time allowed (10 days following election day) and options available to a voter to cure their ballot once they are notified of the missing signature.

Over the past several years, DoTheMostGood members who participated in ballot curing in other states including Pennsylvania, Virginia and Georgia experienced progressively worsening anti-voter practices. Safeguarding the vote and prioritizing the intent of the voter put Maryland and each of its citizens in a stronger position.

Therefore, DTMG strongly supports SB0163 and urges a FAVORABLE report on this bill. Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Barbara Noveau". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being the most prominent.

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