

# VOTE HOME

I am providing testimony on SB163 in my capacity as the Government Affairs Director for the National Vote at Home Institute, a nonprofit nonpartisan organization that is focused on improving the voting experience for voters across the country and implementing convenient voting options to include effective ballot delivery systems (commonly known as vote-by-mail) along with in-person voting options. Since 2018, we have provided state and local election officials, policymakers, the media, civic organizations, and others with timely research, education, consultation, and advocacy work to improve and expand vote-at-home options nationwide.

We strongly support, with our added recommendations, Senator Kagan's Senate Bill 163 to allow for preprocessing of absentee ballots and implementing robust notification and curing processes, which empower voters with timely and actionable information about their ballots.

Preprocessing covers an assortment of processes that must occur before a mail ballot can be counted. This typically includes scanning ballots into the system and marking them as "received," verifying or checking for the presence of a voter's signature, identifying any errors with a ballot that can be "cured" by the voter, and removing ballots from their envelopes in preparation for counting. Maryland temporarily implemented preprocessing in 2020. The bill makes it clear that no tabulation can take place until the close of polls on Election Day. 38 states allow for preprocessing, which greatly benefits the voter, election administrators, and democracy in general.

Perhaps the biggest winner with SB 163 is the voter. By enabling election officials to preprocess ballots, voters can expect to know the status of their ballot earlier in the process, more timely reporting of election results, and a longer window to cure their ballot if there are mistakes. Allowing a voter to cure any issues with their mail ballot is a critical safety net. While election officials do a great job trying to make the process clear, voters can still make mistakes. A voter shouldn't be denied the opportunity to participate in democracy for such inadvertent errors.

The election administrator also benefits as they can have all the mail ballots received before election day verified, scanned, and awaiting tabulation. This allows them to spread the work out over the days

leading up to election day, work shorter shifts, and save money as pre-processing requires less staff and overtime than waiting till election day to begin the process.

NVAHI has two recommendations for SB163. One is that the deadline be moved from 10 a.m. on the tenth day to the end of the day, either the end of the ninth day or the end of the tenth day. This will allow for the election administrator to count all the cure letters that come into the office through the U.S. Postal Service as not all mail is delivered by 10 a.m.

The second recommendation concerns the requirement to report by precinct and by vote method. We would suggest adding a clause that makes an exception if voter privacy could be compromised. This would occur when so few voters use a particular voting method, and one could determine who the voter cast their vote for. Provisional ballots cast are most at risk of this. The most common practice is to include them with another category and make note of the combination.

I encourage you to support SB163 with the recommended changes.

Thank you,

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