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HB 212
Ways and Means Committee

Election Law - Absentee Ballots - Signature Requirements and Verification
February 1, 2022

Position: Opposition

The Arc Maryland is Maryland's largest grassroots organization dedicated to protecting and advancing rights of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. We respectfully submit this written testimony in opposition to HB 212 which would make it a requirement that any voter using an absentee, or mail in ballot to have signature verification if they were unable to sign due to a disability. The Arc Maryland opposes this measure because it may have the unintended consequence of disenfranchising voters with disabilities.

Many people with disabilities use various accommodations to sign documents such as name stamps, personal assistance, or having some type of functional signature. People with disabilities are the largest minority group represented in the United States with one in four as having been identified according to data put forward by the Centers for Disease Control.¹ People with IDD have historically faced barriers to exercising their voting rights and this legislation would present one more.

Signature verification through requiring a person to have a witness sign to verify a ballot for those individuals who do not sign a ballot in a traditional way, would also interfere with the autonomy and privacy of the ballot for voters with disabilities because someone will know how the person voted. Moreover, people with disabilities would not be able to exercise their right to vote independently.

When the state took action to improve accessibility to the ballot during the pandemic by making it possible for people to request absentee ballots, the action helped to eliminate barriers such as transportation and voting center physical inaccessibility for a significant portion of the population. This legislation would have us taking a significant step back in the accessibility of exercising voting rights of people with disabilities.

For all of these reasons, we are hopeful for an unfavorable report from the Committee on HB 212. Thank you for your consideration.

Should you have any questions please contact Mat Rice, Director of Public Policy

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¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandhealth/infographic-disability-impacts-all.html>