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**HB 99**  
**Ways and Means Committee**

**Election Law - Absentee Ballots - Signature Requirements and Verification**  
**January 25, 2022**

**Position: Opposition**

The Arc Maryland is Maryland's largest, grassroots advocacy organization advocating for the rights of people with intellectual, and/or developmental disabilities. We respectfully submit this written testimony in opposition to HB 99 which would make it a requirement that any voter using an absentee, or mail in ballot to have signature verification with a witness 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.<sup>i</sup> This means that people with disabilities make up a significant voting block. People with IDD have historically faced barriers to exercising their voting rights and this legislation would present one more.

To signature verification, 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, the requirement of a witness means some people with disabilities would not be able to exercise their right to vote independently.

When the General Assembly passed the legislation 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 voting rights of people with disabilities.

For all of these reasons, we are hopeful for an unfavorable report from the Committee on HB99. Thank you for your consideration.

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

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