

Maryland PIRG

Rishi Shah, Maryland PIRG Advocate

Testimony for HB0329

Ways & Means Committee

Tuesday, March 8th, 2022

Election Law – Ballots – Processing and Reporting Procedures

Position: Favorable

Maryland PIRG is a state-based, non-partisan, citizen-funded public interest advocacy organization with grassroots members across the state and a student-funded, student-directed chapter at the University of Maryland College Park. For fifty years we've stood up to powerful interests whenever they threaten our health and safety, our financial security, or our right to fully participate in our democratic society.

We support HB 329 to improve the administration of our elections systems, and support the sponsor amendments being put forth today. This legislation responds to the increase of mail-in voting seen in the 2020 elections by creating a ballot curing process, where Marylanders who mistakenly did not sign their mail-in ballot can do so after sending it in. It also makes adjustments to elections administration that improve the function of our elections by enabling early processing of ballots and requiring precinct level reporting

A ballot curing process is important to ensure that Marylanders who intend to vote are able to vote. Of all rejected mail-in ballots in Maryland during the 2020 general election, [42% of these ballots were rejected because they were not signed by the voter](#), totalling to 1,552 total rejected ballots. During the June 2020 primary, [3,290 ballots were rejected because of a lack of signature](#), totalling nearly 5,000 voters throughout 2020. When possible, voters should be alerted to a missed signature and be given the opportunity to fix it.

[18 states already have statutes that require voters to receive notice if there is a missing signature or signature discrepancy on their mail-in ballot](#), and it's time for Maryland to join them. Nobody should lose their voice in our democracy because they forgot to sign a piece of paper.

Additionally, enabling local boards of elections to tabulate ballots before Election Day is crucial as we see an increase in vote by mail both because it speeds up the timeline for results to be certified and because it enables ballot curing. **We urge a favorable report.**