



NATIONAL FEDERATION
OF THE BLIND
MARYLAND

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Subject: Unfavorable with Amendment HB1404

To: House Ways and Means Committee

From: Members of the National Federation of the Blind of Maryland

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Amendment: On page 4, after “An election judge shall give an eligible voter using curbside voting,” change line 27 to read as follows: “the choice to cast their ballot by either using the ballot marking device or the paper ballot.”

Although HB1404 has a good intention which is to make voting more accessible, in reality, it will not accomplish this goal. The National Federation of the Blind of Maryland cannot support this bill for the following reasons, unless the above amendment is added:

Blind people are able to stand in line and go into the physical polling places and generally do not need curbside voting. However, we recognize that people with other disabilities may need this service. The cost of providing curbside voting is too great because it comes at the expense of losing secrecy and privacy in voting. Disabled voters have been fighting for these rights for many years. Giving the rights up for the convenience of curbside voting is not acceptable to us.

On page 4, the bill reads in part, “AN ELIGIBLE VOTER USING CURBSIDE VOTING SHALL BE OBSERVED BY TWO ELECTION JUDGES REPRESENTING DIFFERENT POLITICAL PARTIES.” This requirement creates a loss of privacy for the voter. The National Federation of the Blind of Maryland objects to this requirement. If we use the current ballot marking device, we can vote privately. There is no reason to give up this right.

Many disabled people may not be able to vote using paper ballots because of limited vision, dexterity issues, etc. The bill truly is not providing greater access.

In reality, the bill is promoting segregated voting. The National Federation of the Blind of Maryland strongly objects to this practice and has been fighting for many years to eliminate it. We believe that all voters should use the same voting system so that ballots cannot be identifiable. Maryland currently operates two voting systems which leads to segregation. This bill will just accentuate the segregation of ballots.

The bill in its current format will create more problems than it solves. Please give an unfavorable report to this legislation unless it is amended to include giving the voters the choice to use the ballot marking device.