March 18, 2022

Testimony on SB 163
Election Law – Ballots – Processing and Reporting Procedures
Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

Position: Favorable

Common Cause Maryland supports SB 163, which would alter procedures for the canvassing of and curing of errors on absentee and provisional ballots and require that all election results (including reports of early, absentee, and provisional votes) be reported by precinct.

The strain on the mail-in voting system has increased due to ongoing concern for public health and safety during the COVID-19 pandemic – well over 90% of voters used their mail-in ballot for the June 2020 primaries, and mail-in ballots accounted for nearly 50% of all votes in the 2020 general election. As we will likely continue to see increases in vote by-mail numbers as we move into another critical election year, it is more important than ever that we take necessary measures to support State and local election boards in the secure administration of our elections.

More than 38,000 mail-in ballots were rejected in the 2020 election cycle. While majority of these ballots were rejected during the primary and mostly due to late receipt, many of these ballots could have been accepted with a clear process for ballot curing in place. Ballot curing is a process when election officials reach out to voters and give them a chance to fix or "cure" any remediable issues with their submitted ballot, such as missing oaths or signatures. We want to give local boards an adequate window of time to notify and give voters an opportunity to correct these errors, ensuring that those who intend to vote are able to have their ballot counted in that election.

SB 163 provides common sense steps to improve our mail-in voting process, addressing issues that have long been a challenge for voters (especially those in vulnerable communities like voters with disabilities, students, and the elderly) that have relied on this method of voting prior to the pandemic. For these reasons, we request a favorable report.