



THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Sponsor Testimony in Support of HB1089

**Election Law - Registered Voter List Security and Electronic Signature Requirements for
Petitions**

Delegate Sheila Ruth

March 1, 2022

In 2022, I can sign documents, put in a contract on a house, or sign my tax return with an electronic signature. Electronic signatures are legal and used almost everywhere - except for ballot petitions. These petitions, intended to place a local question, a political party, or an unaffiliated candidate on the ballot, must still be signed on paper.

If I want to exercise this democratic right guaranteed to me under the Maryland Constitution, I must be able to physically sign a piece of paper, generally in the presence of a circulator. Even if I self-certify by signing as both the signer and the circulator, I then still have to return that piece of paper to whomever is collecting the signatures.

This process can be particularly burdensome on people with disabilities, transit-dependent people, or people who work long or irregular hours or multiple jobs.

HB1089 would allow ballot petitions to be signed electronically, which would lower the bar for access to this democratic right for all Marylanders. In 2020, the State Board of Elections allowed electronic signatures for ballot petitions on a temporary basis due to the pandemic, so we know it can be done safely and easily.

HB1089 requires the State Board of Elections to adopt regulations to specify requirements for secure storage and use of voter data, as well as procedures for collecting electronic signatures. When electronic signatures were allowed in 2020, the SBE continued to verify electronic signatures in the same way as those affixed to paper. Electronic signatures will still be required to follow a precise process defined in SBE regulations, thus ensuring they will not be a vehicle for frivolous or fraudulent signatures.

It's time to bring the ballot petition process into the 21st Century and make this Maryland Constitutional Right accessible to all citizens. I ask for a favorable report for HB1089.