

HB 619 - Election Law - Polling Places at Continui

Uploaded by: Aleksandra Petrovic

Position: FAV

February 15, 2022

Testimony on HB 619
Election Law - Polling Places at Continuing Care Retirement Communities
Ways and Means

Position: Favorable

Common Cause Maryland supports HB 619 which would require local boards of elections to establish separate precincts in continuing care retirement communities of 200 or more upon request.

Voting should be accessible for all eligible citizens. Allowing some retirement communities to request a polling place will eliminate many of the burdens that discourage voters from voting, creating greater accessibility and equity in our elections.

For example, in the 2016 presidential election, 71% of Americans over the age of 65 voted, compared with 46% among 18-to 29-year-olds, according to U.S. Census Bureau data. People over the age of 65 continue to show up at the polls far more than any other age group. Additionally, the number of voters who fall into the category of “older” keeps rising, and this will continue to be the case for the next few decades. Older people are more likely to view voting as a responsibility and care about a broad range of issues. Older citizens also tend to be more connected to their communities, which makes them more likely to vote.

Even when offered mail-in ballots, many older Americans prefer voting in person. Eligible voters should be provided every opportunity to exercise their civic duty and have their voice heard in our democracy. Providing polling places to retirement homes would make the voting process more convenient for older voters who wish to vote in person, particularly for those with scheduling and transportation challenges. Additionally, long waiting lines are a burden for older voters and can be avoided for those living in retirement centers if a polling place is provided.

We encourage a favorable report.

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Uploaded by: Kevin Kinnally

Position: UNF



House Bill 619

Election Law - Polling Places at Continuing Care Retirement Communities

MACo Position: **OPPOSE**

To: Ways and Means Committee

Date: February 15, 2022

From: Kevin Kinnally

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **OPPOSES** HB 619. This bill would mandate that local boards of elections establish voting precincts in any continuing care retirement community that requests a separate polling place for its residents.

HB 619 places a substantial administrative and cost burden onto local boards of elections, whose functions are supported by county funding. Without state resources to offset these potentially large costs, the bill represents an unfunded mandate on local governments.

Local boards of elections, working in concert with community organizations, regularly conduct voter outreach campaigns in order to extend voting franchise as widely as possible to eligible voters. These programs, combined with Maryland's effort to offer and promote early and mail-in voting, provide voters with a variety of options to exercise their voting privilege.

As a rule, MACo resists state policies that trigger costly or burdensome local implementation. Providing additional precinct locations entails substantial costs for equipment purchases/leases, equipment storage and transportation, staff compensation and training, and other overhead. These costs are nearly fully borne by the county governments.

Under state law, counties have no choice but to fund these costs – competing for limited local funds against public health, schools, public safety, roadway maintenance, and other essential public services.

This bill would place a mandate on county governments to carry out new state policy. Counties would prefer that local boards of elections retain flexibility and discretion in designating polling places to best serve community needs. Accordingly, MACo urges the Committee to issue an **UNFAVORABLE** report on HB 619 and leave these matters in the hands of local elections officials.