

HB 410 Election Reform Act of 2023.pdf

Uploaded by: James Campbell

Position: FAV



One Park Place | Suite 475 | Annapolis, MD 21401-3475
1-866-542-8163 | Fax: 410-837-0269
aarp.org/md | md@aarp.org | twitter: @aarpmd
facebook.com/aarpmd

HB 410 Election Reform Act of 2023
FAVORABLE
House Ways and Means Committee
February 14, 2023

Good afternoon Chairwoman Atterbeary and Members of the House Ways and Means Committee. My name is Jim Campbell, a former member of the House of Delegates and a former member of this committee and now state president of AARP Maryland. AARP MD supports **HB 410 Election Reform Act of 2023**. We thank Delegate Rosenberg for introducing this bill.

AARP is the largest nonprofit, nonpartisan organization representing the interests of Americans age 50 and older and their families. Key priorities of our organization include helping all Marylanders achieve financial and health security. AARP strongly believes that all individuals have the right to be self-reliant and live with dignity in retirement.

HB 410 prohibits a local board of elections from voting to change the location of a polling place unless the local board first holds a meeting to discuss the proposed change and provides an opportunity for individuals and organizations to testify when a polling place changes.

As someone, like many of you, who has worked polling places on election day, I applaud the sponsor for attempting to improve the election process. We want all citizens to exercise their right to vote, it is important that citizens know where to vote. Polling places should be located equitably across neighborhoods. This gives everyone equal access to the polls. This is especially important when a neighborhood does not have enough polling places to accommodate the number of voters, and lines are especially long.

AARP believes that voting-rights laws should address the needs of people, improve access to registration and polling places. AARP also believes that when a polling place changes or is about to change, the changes need to have community input. AARP also believes that better outreach to older adults and people with disabilities is essential during any election especially when there are changes.

AARP Maryland respectfully requests the House Ways and Means Committee to issue a favorable report for HB410. For questions or additional information, please feel free to contact Tammy Bresnahan, Director of Advocacy at tbresnahan@aarp.org or by calling 410-302-8451.



HB 410 - Election Reform Act of 2023.pdf

Uploaded by: Morgan Drayton

Position: FAV

March 23, 2023

**Testimony on HB 410
Election Reform Act of 2023
Energy, Education, and the Environment**

Position: Favorable with Amendments

Common Cause Maryland is in favor of HB 410, which creates a reasonable framework to govern changes to polling place locations and protect local boards of elections against frivolous and coordinated Public Information Act requests.

The bill requires local boards of elections to first hold a public meeting to discuss proposed changes to the location of a polling place and provide an opportunity for interested individuals and organizations to give testimony on the proposal. The local board would also be required to maintain a contact list of certain elected officials and neighborhood groups who are to be informed of proposed changes if they are to occur more than 21 day before an election.

Additionally, HB 410 would authorize the State Board of Elections and local boards of elections to temporarily deny a Public Information Act request received within 90 days of a primary or general election and until Certification if the custodian believes that the request would impair the ability of the board to prepare for the election. We believe that this is a limited exception to the standard policy of open requests is a necessary trade-off to ensure that State and local boards have the time and resources to reasonably fulfill the requests without interfering with the administration of the election.

HB 410 provides necessary policy changes that bring us closer to our shared ideal of fair, open, and transparent elections. For these reasons, we would request a favorable report on the bill.

Testimony HB 410_Election Reform_Senate.pdf

Uploaded by: Samuel Rosenberg

Position: FAV

SAMUEL I. "SANDY" ROSENBERG
Legislative District 41
Baltimore City

Health and Government Operations
Committee
Chair
Health Occupations and
Long-Term Care Subcommittee

House Chair
Joint Committee on Administrative,
Executive, and Legislative Review



THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Respond to Office Indicated

□ *Annapolis Office*
The Maryland House of Delegates
6 Bladen Street, Room 365
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
410-841-3297 · 301-858-3297
800-492-7122 Ext. 3297
Samuel.Rosenberg@house.state.md.us

□ *District Office*
4811 Liberty Heights Avenue
Baltimore, Maryland 21207
410-664-2646

Testimony of Delegate Samuel I. Rosenberg

Before the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

in Support of

House Bill 410

Election Reform Act of 2023

Mister Chairman and Members of the Committee:

Imagine the polling place where you have voted for years being moved to a new location – one without parking.

That happened during the last election cycle in my legislative district, frustrating voters and disrupting the election process.

House Bill 410 seeks to prevent such incidents from hindering voters in future elections. This bill would prohibit a board of elections from changing the location of a polling place without providing an opportunity for affected individuals and organizations to be heard at a public meeting.

Further, the bill would require local boards of elections to submit a polling place plan to the State Board of Elections at least six months before each statewide primary election. If a local board proposes reducing the number of polling places more than 5% below the level available in the 2018 general election, it must demonstrate that the plan would not negatively impact access to voting in historically disenfranchised communities.

This legislation would also extend the existing prohibition on using illegal means to influence – or attempt to influence – a voter’s decision whether to go to the polls to include voting by mail or drop box. This component of the bill provides a common-sense update to our current election laws to reflect those increasingly popular avenues for voting.

Lastly, this bill would also move the 2024 Primary Election Day to May 14, as the originally scheduled date conflicted with Passover and Ramadan.

Together, the changes proposed by this bill will eliminate a number of potential impediments for Maryland voters, increasing the chances that they will be able to vote. After all, our democracy is stronger when everyone has the chance to have their voice heard.

I urge a favorable report on HB 410.

March 28, 2023

Senate HB410 Election Reform Act of 2023.docx.pdf

Uploaded by: Katherine Berry

Position: UNF



Maryland Association of Election Officials

Representing the Local Election Boards of the State of Maryland

March 27, 2023

Sen. Brian E. Feldman, Chair
Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
2 West Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: HB410 - Oppose

Senator Feldman and Committee Members:

My name is Katherine Berry. I am the Election Director in Carroll County and the chair of the Maryland Association of Election Officials (MAEO) Legislative Committee. MAEO represents the local boards of elections throughout the State of Maryland. I am writing today representing MAEO to oppose HB410 – Election Reform Act of 2023 as amended during the Ways and Means Committee conference.

HB410, as amended, introduces an entire series of concerns from stripping local board authority to a massive local fiscal impact. Most notably, an off-topic amendment was added, completely changing the bill's intended focus. This amendment adds a requirement that the total number of separate buildings used as polling places be no greater than 5% below the total number of separate buildings used as polling places in the 2018 general election. This is extremely problematic for many reasons:

The amendment **uses a template of a pre-pandemic year to face the post-pandemic reality**. This bill mandates the use of 2010 Census data to address the needs of the 2020 Census and fails to account for the current reality. It overlooks the impact of precinct line changes resulting from the 2020 Census, which has led to **difficulties in finding suitable public spaces** that comply with security, ADA standards, and space requirements. Moreover, some counties face additional challenges such as closures of schools, fire departments, and senior living communities due to COVID-19, parking, and security issues.

Maryland has **improved voting opportunities** with its expanded mail-in ballot system and offers robust in-person early voting opportunities. Strict adherence to “precinct polling place” requirements using numbers from 5 years ago robs our local boards of the needed flexibility we rely upon to address **strained resources** and inclement situations.

The requirements of this bill **take away local control that has been entrusted to the Board Members** of each local board who were appointed by the Governor. The members of the board are expected to have an understanding of the needs and makeup of their counties in order to approve what they feel is best for their voters. All board members work closely with their Election Directors during redistricting so that they can approve a map that is fair to the voters and administratively sound for meeting all requirements involved with managing a polling place.

The proposed requirements for polling place plans are onerous and involve a lengthy process during the run-up to an election while our resources are spread thin **without any appropriation for additional funding**. Local boards of elections are estimating that **it could take months to prepare a report on polling places** if their county is less than 5% variance for approval by the State Board of Elections. Some of the required information is not as readily available to provide in the report. If circumstances beyond the control of the local board occur, such as building availability, inability to recruit judges or insufficient resources, a county may **find itself non-compliant through no fault of their own**.

Given that voters have recently experienced a general election where some were reassigned to a new polling place due to redistricting, it is our recommendation that this committee allow these voters to continue voting at their current polling location until the next redistricting process in 2031. It is imperative to avoid the potential complications that may arise if we are forced to rely on the polling place guidelines from 2018 during the next redistricting cycle. We urge the committee to carefully consider this suggestion and take necessary action to ensure the integrity of our election system. Immediate action to table this bill should be taken for the voters in the State of Maryland. If not, polling places that we are required to add will cause voter confusion, polling places across the State will not open because of a lack of election judges, and the trust that we have fostered in the process will be shattered.

MAEO supported the original intention of this bill that would have fixed a possible exploit in the PIA process that would impair the board's ability to prepare for an election, but unfortunately, this was amended out.

Thank you for your time. If you have any questions, please contact me at (410)386-2958 or Katherine.berry@maryland.gov.

www.maeo.net

Form Letter Concerning HB410 Election Reform Act o

Uploaded by: Lyndsey Ryan

Position: UNF



TALBOT COUNTY BOARD OF ELECTIONS

215 BAY STREET, SUITE 7

P.O. BOX 353

EASTON, MD 21601

Email: talbot.elections@maryland.gov

PHONE: 410-770-8099 ♦ FAX: 410-770-8078

Senator Brian E Feldman, Chair
Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
2 West Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: Opposition to HB410

My name is Tamara Stafford and I am the Election Director for Talbot County. I am writing to strongly oppose HB410 – Election Reform Act of 2023. The bill, with the amendments added in the Ways and Means Committee, is very different from the initial bill that MAEO supported and, as it exists currently, would add an undue burden on our Local Board of Elections.

The initial purpose of this bill was to ensure that voters were aware of changes in polling place locations and to address a potential exploit in the PIA process that could cause issues with the election preparation process.

However, an amendment unrelated to the original focus was added, significantly altering the bill's intent. The new requirements for polling place plans are burdensome and require a lengthy process, which would be challenging to manage during the busy election season. Additionally, there is no additional funding allocated to support these significant changes, further straining our limited resources.

The amendment's requirement that the total number of precinct polling places should be comparable to the 2018 general election will cause many issues. This rule does not account for the fact that Local Boards of Elections face difficulties in finding suitable buildings that comply with our security, ADA, and space requirements. Furthermore, meeting this requirement would require us to hire and train more judges, which is challenging even with the expected increase in pay.

This amendment uses as a template a pre-pandemic year to face the post-pandemic reality. Maryland has improved voting opportunities with its expanded mail-in ballot system and offers robust in-person early voting opportunities. This past election there was an absence of significant complaints about the number of polling places. Strict adherence to precinct polling places requirements robs our local boards of the needed flexibility we rely upon to address our unique county needs, strained resources, and other inclement situations.

In 2021, the Talbot County Board of Elections made the decision to decrease the number of polling places from 11 in 2018 to 10 in 2022. One of the buildings used in 2018 is no longer available, and there are no other buildings to utilize as polling places in the precinct. The relocated precinct shares a polling place in an adjoining precinct, 6.4 miles away. The polling place is located in a public school and provides better accessibility to voters.

The board action met the provisions of existing Section 10-101. However, under the proposed bill, Talbot County would be in violation, as the decrease in polling places is more than 5% of the total number of polling places used in 2018. House Bill 410 will require the local board to establish a polling place in a location where a suitable building does not exist, when the local board has already determined the best solution.

While we are not planning a reduction of polling places in 2024, House Bill 410 does not provide provisions for areas where precincts may need to share a polling place because of a lack of suitable buildings. This creates an unnecessary challenge for the local boards and leaves the voters without an accessible polling place.

Thank you for your time. If you have any questions, please contact me at 410-770-8098 or tammy.stafford@maryland.gov.

Sincerely,

Tamara Stafford
Election Director