



THE SENATE OF MARYLAND  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

March 13, 2023

SB 605 – Election Law - Citizens Who Live Overseas - Right to Vote

Chair Feldman, Vice-Chair Kagan, and Esteemed Members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee:

I am presenting Senate Bill 605, legislation that would permit U.S. citizens and Maryland voters who reside abroad to vote in state and local elections. This effort continues to build on the important work of the Maryland General Assembly in ensuring ballot accessibility. This legislation alleviates a significant challenge faced by Maryland voters who reside abroad. Whether they are members of the uniformed services or civilians living/working outside of the country, their voting rights are currently limited. Maryland voters residing abroad depend on mail-in voting and encounter voting barriers.

SB 605 enables Maryland voters who live abroad to receive and vote a full ballot in federal, state, and local elections. Maryland law permits most voters abroad only a federal ballot. If declared their “return is uncertain,” 32 states allow their voters abroad full ballot access.

All Maryland citizens are impacted by decisions made at the state and local levels. For example, legislation debated by this General Assembly about family law, programs for veterans, medical insurance coverage, and tuition rates can directly impact these voters. Additionally, Maryland voters abroad are concerned about the issues at the state and local levels that impact their families, friends, and loved ones. They take these into account when casting their votes from their host countries.

According to the Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP) in their 2020 Post-Election Report to Congress, the voter participation rate for all overseas voters was eight percent, with an estimated ballot request rate of twelve percent compared to seventy-eight percent participation stateside.

FVAP notes that over half of the estimated 70% voting gap between stateside voters and overseas voters is due to obstacles to voting that are specific to the overseas voting population. This gap is defined as “the percentage of overseas citizens who wanted or tried to vote but were

unsuccessful.” They acknowledge voters may have benefitted by “state legislative changes.” SB 605 will help accomplish this.

To ensure equitable participation in our American democratic process from Maryland voters residing abroad, I urge the committee to give a favorable report for SB605.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Karen Lewis Young". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Senator Karen Lewis Young