



Ella Ennis, Legislative Chairman  
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The Honorable Vanessa Atterbeary, Chairman  
and Members of the Ways and Means Committee  
Maryland House of Delegates  
Annapolis, Maryland

RE: **HB0535** – Election Law - Ballot Processes and Reporting Procedures – **OPPOSED**

Dear Chairman Atterbeary and Committee Members,

The Maryland Federation of Republican Women have concerns about the security and accuracy of the processes for conducting the election canvas set out in HB 0535.

Protecting counted ballots in the most secure manner possible and preventing premature disclosure are paramount to a fair election and voters' confidence and acceptance of the election results.

- 1) The time allowed to process ballots is too long. HB 0535 requires the local Board to begin processing absentee ballots 8 business days prior to the first day of Early Voting. Absentee ballots will be opened and read by the tabulating machine at least 20 days before Election Day. That is a very long time to maintain security of the opened ballots, the vote tabulators and the vote count, greatly increasing the possibility that the vote count will become public knowledge.
- 2) The stated process does not indicate if a bi-partisan team must conduct the canvass. Whether you have a smaller team process ballots for 8 business days before Early Voting or a larger team process ballots for 1 day, the cost would be similar.
- 3) Accuracy of signature added by electronic means. The bill allows a voter to submit a missing signature on the oath on the absentee ballot envelope by a picture in text message, e-mail or an accessible online portal. It does not require signature verification to the voter's original voter registration on record. This is open to fraud. Someone voting in place of the voter could submit a signature or have a copy of the voter's signature and submit it. There is no mention of signature verification. A mailed form or an in-person visit to the local Board is the only secure method for submitting the signature. A mailed ballot process that requires a witness to the voter's signature on the ballot envelope or the correcting document could improve security of the process as well.



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- 4) Equal treatment of missing signatures on the oath for mailed and provisional ballots. The process for adding a signature to the oath on the ballot envelope for a mailed ballot is more generous than for a voter voting with a provisional ballot. While the person who uses a mailed ballot is contacted and given 10 days to add their signature, a person who fails to sign the oath on a provisional ballot application has their ballot rejected. These voters are not treated equally.
  
- 5) Which absentee ballot will be counted if more than one ballot is received from a voter?  
HB 0535 assumes that the first sufficient ballot received is the one to be counted. However, it is possible that a voter didn't receive their requested mailed ballot, requested a replacement, and sent it in. Someone else could have intercepted the first ballot, fraudulently voted the first ballot and sent it in first. The bill does not require contacting the voter to find out if they submitted two ballots, or when they mailed their ballot. The process is arbitrary.

Ensuring that the integrity of the election process is maintained is vital to our democracy. Citizens must believe the election process is fair and accurate. The desire to make voting easy and accessible must be balanced against the need to protect the integrity of the election. Flaws in HB 0535 bring that integrity into question.

Please vote an **UNFAVORABLE** report for **HB 0535**.

Sincerely,  
Ella Ennis  
Legislative Chairman  
Maryland Federation of Republican Women