

TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE

HB 645 - Election Law - Electronic Ballot Return System - Study and Request for Proposals

POSITION: Favorable

NAME: Jarryd M. Rauch

DATE: February 28, 2023

Committee Chair Feldman and Committee members,

My name is Jarryd Rauch. I am here in support of HB 645, and wish to extend my gratitude to Senator Brooks for introducing this important legislation.

As Executive Director of Democrats Abroad, I am intimately familiar with how states manage and facilitate the voting process for their uniformed and overseas civilian voters. One of the primary reasons overseas ballots are rejected is they arrive after the ballot return deadline. Mail disruptions during the 2020 election cycle, domestically and internationally, demonstrated how easily voters can be disenfranchised if mail service is not functioning properly.

Even with optimal mail service or utilizing U.S. Embassy mail pouches, from many countries it can take weeks or even months for mail to reach the United States, especially with the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting logistical disruptions. In addition to the slow pace and the risk of ballot loss en-route, postal mail can be prohibitively expensive. If a voter opts to use a courier service to ensure their ballot arrives by the deadline, it can cost the voter anywhere from \$40 to over \$100.

Voting in every election could cost an overseas voter hundreds of dollars a year. This is quite plainly a poll tax on voting that disenfranchises Maryland voters all around the world.

To ensure all U.S. voters abroad can return their ballots without undue cost or delay, it is crucial to allow them to return paper overseas absentee ballots via electronic transmission. The requisite study outlined in HB 645 is an important first step for Maryland to join the two-thirds of U.S. states and the District of Columbia which already permit secure electronic ballot transmission, thus eliminating known barriers for overseas voters to exercise their right to vote.

Many did not have a voice in the election of representation in this General Assembly, but it is the responsibility of this body to grant that all Marylanders, and US citizens, have that capability going forward.

We urge a favorable report for HB 645. Thank you for your time, and I'm glad to take questions from the committee.

Sincerely,

Jarryd M. Rauch

RESIDES AND VOTES IN: New York City, New York