



TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE

HB 535 – Election Law – Ballots – Processing and Reporting Procedures

POSITION: Favorable

BY: Nancy Soreng, President

DATE: February 14, 2023

In 2020 the League of Women Voters of Maryland conducted a study of best practices for a system allowing voters to vote by mail. One of our recommendations as a result of that study is that the canvass of mail-in ballots should be allowed to begin before Election Day. We therefore support House Bill 535 because it will put this provision into law, an improvement that both legislators and advocates have supported in previous sessions. According to data from the National Conference of State Legislatures, Maryland is the only state that currently requires mail-in ballot processing to wait until after Election Day (Maryland Election Law, §11–302).

In the General Elections of 2020 and 2022, however, permission to start early canvassing was granted by the courts on an emergency basis based on the anticipated volume of mail-in ballots to be processed. Statewide, that amounted to over half a million ballots in the 2022 General Election, about one-quarter of the total number of ballots cast. In the larger counties, this meant hiring additional canvassers and arranging additional workspaces that were both secure and observable.

Allowing early canvassing will help relieve some of the time pressure on these local Boards of Elections and ensure that results can be certified by the statutory deadline. Note that this bill proposes that even with early processing, results will still be held until the polls close on Election Day.

Maryland should join the rest of the nation in permitting ballot processing to start at a sensible date. We strongly urge a favorable report on House Bill 535.