

March 7, 2023

Testimony on HB 926
Election Law – Polling Places – Establishing Voter Identity (Voter Privacy Act of 2023)
Ways and Means

Position: Unfavorable

Common Cause Maryland opposes HB 926, which would require proof of identity in order to vote and a provisional ballot if the voter is unable to provide proof of identity as well as prohibiting a person from knowingly and willfully voting or attempting to vote under a false form of identification.

Voting is celebrated as the most fundamental form of civic participation in a democracy, a means by which all voices are counted on an equal basis. Restrictive identification requirements like a photo ID undermine this goal because it prevents eligible voters from participating, imposes enormous and unjustified costs on states, and does not achieve the goals they claim to work towards.

Studies show that those without ID are disproportionately likely to be Black, Latino, low-income voters, young adults, senior citizens, people with disabilities, be part of the LGBTQ+ community. For many of these eligible persons, it is no simple matter to obtain the necessary ID — the hurdles involved can make doing so difficult, and in some cases, impossible. Having a certified copy of one's birth certificate is a prerequisite to obtaining identification from a DMV. However, many people do not have their birth certificate, have lost it, or never had one in the first place. Given that a driver's license is the most typical form of ID required to vote, it stands to reason that citizen without identification do not necessarily have an easy way to physically get to the offices they need to go to in order to get ID. And even if travel can be arranged, there are limited hours of service many DMVs provide, combined with long waits at the DMV, creating a third barrier for obtaining identification.

The risk of disenfranchisement is far greater than the evidence of voter fraud in Maryland. Millions of citizens residing in states with these restrictive laws do not currently possess the requisite photo ID needed to vote. And while there is anecdotal evidence of voter fraud, there has never been proof that fraud is occurring on a scale that would necessitate this type of measure – or outweigh its risks.

HB 926 would roll back basic protections that allow all registered voters to engage in our democratic process.

We urge an unfavorable report.