

TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE

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

POSITION: Favorable

NAME: Candice Kerestan

HEARING DATE: February 28, 2023

Committee Chair Atterbeary and Distinguished Committee members,

My name is Candice Kerestan, and I am calling in today from Munich, Germany. Thank you for allowing me to testify remotely.

I currently serve as the State Party Chair of Democrats Abroad, one of the Democratic National Committee's 57 state parties. Democrats Abroad is the largest organization of U.S. citizens outside of the United States, and represents the millions of Americans living permanently or temporarily abroad, including many from Maryland.

At the center of our mission is ensuring that U.S. citizens overseas – regardless of party – can and do exercise their constitutional right to vote. That is why I am asking you to please support House Bill 645, which prescribes a study be implemented on creating an electronic ballot return system for Maryland voters.

Overseas voters – including active duty military, military families, veterans, and civilians like myself – are guaranteed the right to vote under current U.S. law. The majority of U.S. states permit their citizens abroad with the right to return their ballots via electronic methods, such as by fax, email or online upload. This is not the case in Maryland. In fact, all Maryland voters abroad are required to return their ballots exclusively by postal mail.

Maryland voters abroad live all around the world. While hard to imagine, U.S. citizens live in countries that lack reliable postal service. They also live in remote places where even if the mail service works, the time between sending and receiving mail can take weeks or months. During the COVID-19 pandemic, some countries suspended international airmail entirely.

In addition to barriers of functionality and time, cost is also a problem. We often hear that voters return their ballots by courier services to ensure their ballot will be received and counted. This can be very expensive, \$50 or more. Voters report that these costs mean they cannot afford to vote.

House Bill 645 paves the way for Maryland to join the majority of states that ensure their citizens abroad can have a say in their government without logistical or financial obstacles. Being able to vote is a pillar to our democracy - and both a responsibility and privilege of being a US citizen.

As I recently traveled the roads of Maryland, Governor Moore's name along with the phrase, "Leave No One Behind" stood out. In advocating for the voting rights of Marylanders living all around the world, I ask you to not leave your overseas voters and their rights behind. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Candice Kerestan

RESIDES IN: Munich, Germany

VOTES IN: Pennsylvania