



Maryland Association of Election Officials

Representing the Local Election Boards of the State of Maryland

February 10, 2023

Delegate Vanessa E. Atterbeary, Chair
Maryland House Ways and Means Committee
Room 131, House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401-1991

RE: HB535 – Support with amendment

Chair Atterbeary and Committee Members:

My name is Katherine Berry. I am the Election Director in Carroll County and the chair of the Maryland Association of Election Officials (MAEO) Legislative Committee. MAEO represents the local boards of elections throughout the State of Maryland. I am writing today representing MAEO to support HB535 – Election Law – Ballots – Processing and Reporting Procedures with an amendment.

MAEO believes that allowing mail-in ballots to be canvassed prior to the start of early voting will:

1. Help voters to feel that their vote is more inclusive in election night results
2. Gives more flexibility to candidates who wish to attend the canvass
3. Allows for a larger portion of results to be provided on election night

This bill allows for us to open, duplicate, and scan ballots beginning 8 days prior to election day, but also allows for a waiver to be granted by the State Board of Elections if there are not a substantial number of ballots to canvass. As evidenced in the 2022 Election Cycle, the majority of mail-in ballots are not returned to our offices until closer to the start of early voting, so flexibility for a waiver to be granted...

MAEO supports the bill's allowance of opening, duplicating and scanning the mail-in ballots ahead of time. The local boards of elections have already been curing ballots to the greatest extent possible, so this would just codify that practice.

One area of this bill that will be a particular challenge, especially as web delivered mail-in ballots are increasing, is the requirement for a 2-day receipt period for ballots. Web delivered ballot envelopes have to be manually reviewed and researched to be read into the database because there is no barcode like mailed mail-in ballots. Depending on the amount of web delivered ballots, as well as other circumstances, such as the daily volume of returned ballots, number of staff available to receive the ballots and other office activities, it may not be as feasible to have it done in a 2-day window. MAEO would like to request making this a 5-business day window for the reasons provided above.

As a point of information only, MAEO would like to note that this bill is codifying language to require all election results to be available by precinct. This was done in 2022 and was a particular challenge due to multiple page ballots and nearly 1,000 ballot styles being made available at early voting in some jurisdictions. There are significant costs associated with managing this volume of ballot styles and a greater responsibility on election judges to ensure voters are given the proper ballot. In addition, some counties may have to relocate early voting locations for the Presidential election cycle due to restricted amounts of space in the center to manage the number of ballots required to be available.

We are hopeful that this committee will support this bill and consider our amendment request. Thank you for your time. If you have any questions, please contact me at (410)386-2958 or Katherine.berry@maryland.gov.