

Dear Members of the Legislature,

Please consider passing HB 0035 to implement a Voter ID requirement for in-person voting. As some of you may be aware, Maryland is one of only 15 states to have no voter ID requirement at all, which jeopardizes both the security of and the confidence in our elections.

Regarding election security, voter ID is critical. Under current policy, individuals wishing to vote in a Maryland election need only supply their name, address, and date of birth when checking in to a polling place. This process is not sufficiently secure. It would be easy, for instance, for anyone who knew this information about a spouse, friend, or colleague, to present this information and vote on their behalf. And unfortunately, this kind of voter impersonation is only easier in our digital information age, where personal information is often hacked and published on websites like Spokeo or Ratemylife for all to see, sometimes at a nominal fee, and sometimes with no restrictions at all. This is partially why, in 2005, Congress enacted the REAL ID Act, which Maryland became an early adopter of between the years of 2017 and 2020.

The Act established minimum security standards for ID issuance and production and prohibits certain federal agencies from accepting for certain purposes driver's licenses and identification cards that do not meet REAL ID standards. A REAL ID Act compliant identification is required even for every day tasks such as boarding an airplane or gaining access to a federal building, and therefore should certainly be required for an activity as vital to our nation's interests as voting. This requirement would put no additional burden on Maryland's voters, as those who have Driver's Licenses already have a REAL ID, and those who do not are able to obtain a REAL ID compliant state ID free of charge for the purpose of voting from any MVA. REAL ID requires proof of age (i.e., birth certificate or passport); proof of social security (i.e., social security card), and two documents to verify Maryland residency, which would eliminate the need for voters to state this information upon arrival at their polling places on election day or during early voting.

Additionally, requiring voter ID would help Maryland remain in compliance with the Help America Vote Act (HAVA), which encourages state through access to annual federal grants to enact rules that require voters, among other things, to present ID before voting. In order for Maryland to obtain these vital grants to help our elections run smoothly, we must adopt some form of ID requirement for in person voting, and ideally for mail in voting as well.

Some skeptics of Voter ID requirements claim that requiring ID is difficult and/or expensive, and could therefore disenfranchise historically marginalized voters. As mentioned above, a Voter ID requirement does not have to be expensive. For voters who do not have driver's licenses, the MVA is able to provide a voter ID card free of charge, meaning there is no income barrier to obtaining an ID. The requirement of voter ID also does not appear to dissuade voters in any meaningful way from voting for any other reason. Despite Maryland's recent efforts to expand voter participation, such as allowing same day registration, our voter turnout is down. Despite sentiment in both parties that last year's midterms were of vital importance, voter turnout was down 16% compared with 2018, when standards were higher. In contrast, Georgia, who enacted voter ID requirements in 2021 legislation, saw their largest midterm turnout in the state's history, suggesting that voters were more likely to vote when they were confident that their elections were secure.

In light of these facts, it is only sensible that Maryland follow Georgia's footsteps, and those of most other states, and enact a requirement for Voter ID.