



THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

**Testimony in Support of HB 261
Unemployment Insurance – Benefits – Election Judges**

This bill aims to recruit more election judges by ensuring that unemployed Marylanders don't lose their unemployment benefits if they serve in this temporary civic role. This bill could help address Maryland's election judge shortages by tapping into the unemployed labor force. Specifically, the bill would exempt the election judge stipend from "wages" that are considered in the calculation of weekly unemployment benefits.

Under current state law, a Marylander who receives unemployment benefits can only receive \$50 in additional weekly wages before their benefits are reduced or terminated. Someone who steps up to help democracy by serving as a temporary election judge shouldn't be at risk of losing the live-saving benefits that support their families.

Maryland already has these same protections in place for people who serve jury duty, another civic duty.

Election judge shortages have become a pressing issue in Maryland with large shortages in the last several election cycles. Many counties, both urban and rural, desperately have to scramble every election cycle to fill understaffed polling locations throughout their jurisdictions. Election judges play a very important role in our elections because every ballot cast in Maryland has to be processed, scrutinized and tabulated by trained election judges working in bipartisan teams. This bill would not fix the shortage issue by itself, but would be an important tool in addressing it.

The General Assembly has taken several steps over the years to try to tackle the election judge shortage issue, including raising minimum election judge pay, requiring the State Board of Elections to develop a marketing campaign, establishing an election day page program (to recruit youth help), and allowing state employees to use administrative leave in order to serve.

Other states have taken actions similar to HB 261 to address their election judge shortages. Six states exempt election judge payments from unemployment benefits.¹ An additional seven states have a high enough income disregard that their unemployment recipients could earn \$250 (Maryland's typical election judge stipend) and not have it affect their benefits.²

¹ Colorado, Minnesota, North Carolina, Nebraska, New Jersey, and New York

² Idaho, Illinois, Massachusetts, North Dakota, Oregon, Rhode Island, and Wyoming