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SB709: Internet-Delivered Ballot Study
Education, Energy, & the Environment Committee
February 21, 2024: 1:00 PM

During the 2022 General Election, 14.8% of Maryland's mail-in ballot requests were delivered via the Internet. This is more than a 50% increase compared to the 2020 General Election. Voters are generally unaware of the massive burden the decision to print a ballot themselves places on both them and their Local Board of Elections (LBE). The average person reflects on the fact that they shop online; bank online; purchase plane tickets online; and even date online. Why wouldn't they choose to receive their ballot online? While it may seem easy to print a ballot from home, it requires that the voter has a printer, toner cartridge, paper, a #10 envelope, and a postage stamp. This may be why Internet-delivered ballots are returned at a much lower rate than mailed ballots (67% v 89%).

This represents just the beginning of the process. Once the ballot is received at an LBE, it must be manually duplicated by a bipartisan team in a time-consuming, expensive, painstaking way onto a blank ballot. Only then can the newly-created ballot be scanned and tabulated. The additional step is required because the paper in our home printers is not compatible with election scanners. This tedious process slows the release of election results, fostering unnecessary distrust in our elections. It could even cause counties to miss the legal certification deadline.

In addition to the administrative burden, Internet-delivered ballots also raise security concerns. What happens if someone uses your personal information to request a ballot online in your name? Or, what if your email is hacked? Will an individual be forced to vote provisionally if the email goes to their spam folder and they miss it? We do not yet have answers for these important security questions.

As amended, SB709 will direct the State Board of Elections (SBE) to conduct a study on the costs, security, staffing requirements, facility needs, extra time, ballot return rates, and other additional delays caused by the existing Internet-delivered ballot system. This data will prove helpful for future policy debates.

The SBE will use data from the 2020, 2022, and 2024 Primary and General Elections. The report would be submitted to the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee and the House Ways & Means Committee, no later than January 8, 2025.

I urge a favorable report for SB709 as amended.