



Senate Bill 802: Election Law – Voters With Disabilities – Electronic Ballot Return

Testimony of Maryland Centers for Independent Living

SUPPORT

Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee, February 21, 2024

Centers for Independent Living (CIL) are created by federal law. CILs work to enhance civil rights and community services for people with disabilities. There are seven CILs throughout Maryland, operated by and for people with disabilities. At least 51% of CIL staff and Board are people with disabilities. CILs provide Information and Referral, Advocacy, Peer Support, Independent Living Skills training, and Transition Services to individuals in their communities. Housing services are provided by CILs and are a critical element of independent living.

When the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was signed 31 years ago, it provided historic civil rights protections for disabled Americans and provided the four core outcomes of full participation, equal opportunity, independent living, and economic self-sufficiency. Full participation should include disability inclusive democracy. Americans with disabilities still face barriers in fully participating in many aspects of their lives including participation in democratic elections.

SB 802 would permit individuals with disabilities to return a marked absentee ballot to a local election board electronically, as specified in the bill.

The removal of any barrier to participating in the democratic process would permit more people with disabilities to participate in democratic elections by allowing them to exercise their right to vote. Expanding the means by which a person with a disability could return a marked absentee ballot would permit greater access in exercising their right to vote without navigating barriers that would otherwise limit their ability to participate in elections.

Allowing Marylanders with disabilities to return marked absentee ballots electronically would increase participation in the democratic process. Disability inclusive democracy is good for all Marylanders.

The Maryland Independent Network strongly **supports** SB 802 and urges a **favorable** report.

We appreciate the consideration of these comments.

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