



## Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council

CREATING CHANGE • IMPROVING LIVES

House Ways and Means Committee

SB 685: Election Law - Local Boards of Elections - Language-Related Assistance

February 18, 2025

Letter of Information

The Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council (Council) is an independent, public policy organization that creates change to make it possible for people with developmental disabilities to live the lives they want with the support they need. From this perspective, the Council advocates for policies and programs that make Maryland a place where everyone can effectively participate in the electoral process.

**Voting is a fundamental right that Maryland's citizens with developmental disabilities want and need to access.** Many voters with disabilities report they cannot participate in the electoral process due to access issues. The U.S. Election Commission found that 20% of voters with disabilities had trouble on Election Day due to accessibility at polling locations compared to 6% among voters without disabilities.

We understand the intention of this bill is to increase access for all voters with Limited English Proficiency, including voters with disabilities. If implemented, we recommend the State Board of Elections ensure that all electoral communication is accessible for communities that use Sign Language such as American Sign Language. This requires thoughtful consideration of the practical implementation of how to make materials available, especially for communication that occurs in advance of Election Day, such as registration notices, sample ballots, etc. The best way to do this is by continuing to work with disability advocates in the community.

*While investments in voting equity are without question needed, including for people with disabilities, the Council believes that the amount, purpose, and timing of such efforts must take into consideration the needs of all Marylanders with disabilities. Funding for this bill should not be offset by limiting essential funding for other critical needs, most immediately the Developmental Disabilities Administration community services that thousands of Marylanders depend upon.*

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