Senate Bill 361

Election Law - Influence on a Voter's Voting Decision By Use of Fraud - Prohibition

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**

To: Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

Date: February 26, 2025

From: Kevin Kinnally

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS** SB 361. This bill strengthens Maryland's election laws by prohibiting deepfakes and other synthetic media from fraudulently influencing voters or misrepresenting candidates during elections.

Counties administer elections and play a critical role in ensuring their integrity. The rise of "deepfakes" —manipulated videos, images, and audio generated through artificial intelligence — poses a significant threat to voter confidence and the democratic process. This bill provides a necessary safeguard by ensuring election officials have the tools to combat deceptive practices and maintain public trust in Maryland's elections.

The bill expands the definition of fraud to include synthetic media that misrepresents a candidate's speech or actions. This targeted approach allows local election officials to respond proactively to emerging threats and reinforces Maryland's commitment to fair, transparent, and secure elections. By closing this gap in existing law, the bill helps protect voters from misinformation designed to manipulate electoral outcomes.

Counties are critical in protecting election integrity by ensuring voters receive accurate information and preventing deceptive practices. This bill supports these efforts by addressing the growing threat of synthetic media and enhancing safeguards against emerging digital manipulation, ensuring Maryland remains a leader in election security and transparency.

SB 361 provides necessary and timely policy changes that balance the shared goals of providing fair, open, and transparent elections. Accordingly, MACo urges a **FAVORABLE** report on SB 361.