

Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
SB 838 Election Law – Absentee Ballots – Signature Requirements and Verification
February 26, 2025

Position: Oppose

The Arc Maryland is Maryland's largest, grassroots advocacy organization advocating for the rights of people with intellectual, and/or developmental disabilities. We respectfully submit this written testimony in opposition to SB 838 which would make it a requirement for any voter, using an absentee or mail in ballot, to have signature verification with a witness if they were unable to sign due to a disability. The Arc Maryland opposes this measure because it may have the effect of disenfranchising voters with disabilities and rendering their ballot non-private.

A segment of the population of voters with disabilities use various accommodations to sign documents such as name stamps, personal assistance, or having some type of functional signature. People with disabilities are the largest minority group represented in the United States with one in four as having been identified according to data put forward by the Centers for Disease Control.ⁱ This means that people with disabilities make up a significant voting block. People with IDD have historically faced barriers to exercising their voting rights and this legislation would present one more.

To require signature verification, for those individuals who do not sign a ballot in a traditional way, would also interfere with the autonomy and privacy of the ballot. It would require the voter with disabilities to identify a witness who would have access to the person's ballot prior to postage. Moreover, the requirement of a witness means a person with disabilities would be denied the right to vote independently.

For these reasons, The Arc Maryland requests an unfavorable report from the Committee on SB 838.

For more information, please contact Ande Kolp, The Arc Maryland
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ⁱ <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandhealth/infographic-disability-impacts-all.html>