

**SENATE EDUCATION, ENERGY, AND THE ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE**

**February 5, 2025**

**SB 18 – Election Law – Early Voting – Number of Days**

**Position: SUPPORT**

Disability Rights Maryland (DRM) is the Protection & Advocacy agency in Maryland, federally mandated to advance the civil rights of people with disabilities. DRM works to increase opportunities for Marylanders with disabilities to be part of their communities through voting by advocating for equal and equitable access to the ballot box.

DRM strongly supports SB 18, which extends the early voting period by four days. Expanding early voting enhances voter participation by providing a more accessible means to cast a ballot. This extension is important for individuals with disabilities as it allows greater flexibility, increasing the opportunity to exercise fundamental voting rights.

Over the past few election cycles, the number of voters with disabilities has increased as access to the ballot box has expanded. In 2020, 62% of individuals with disabilities cast their votes—a significant rise from 56% in 2016.<sup>1</sup> Further, the Rutgers Program for Disability Research found that 40.2 million Americans were eligible to vote in 2024.<sup>2</sup> It is apparent that strengthening access to the voting process will result in more Americans engaging in the practice.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.eac.gov/news/2021/07/07/new-data-177-million-americans-disabilities-voted-2020-significant-increase-over>

<sup>2</sup>

[https://smlr.rutgers.edu/sites/default/files/Documents/Centers/Program\\_Disability\\_Research/Disability\\_Electorate\\_Projections\\_Report\\_Oct2024.pdf](https://smlr.rutgers.edu/sites/default/files/Documents/Centers/Program_Disability_Research/Disability_Electorate_Projections_Report_Oct2024.pdf)

Early voting enables individuals to engage in the electoral process at a time that fits their schedules, and in a manner that allows their needs and schedules to be accommodated. Prior to the passage of the Help America Vote Act (HAVA) in 2000, the voter turnout for individuals with disabilities was nearly 17% lower than their nondisabled peers. In 2020, the gap has narrowed to 11%.<sup>3</sup> It is clear that individuals with disabilities are ready and eager to engage in an electoral process when provided adequate access. This bill builds on ongoing efforts to eliminate barriers to the ballot box, ensuring a more inclusive voting experience and strengthening our democratic process as a whole.

For these reasons, we request a favorable report on Senate Bill 18. Please do not hesitate to contact me [BradenS@DisabilityRightsMD.org](mailto:BradenS@DisabilityRightsMD.org) or 410-929-6859.

Respectfully submitted,  
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<sup>3</sup> <https://adasoutheast.org/elections-have-gotten-more-accessible-for-disabled-voters-but-gaps-remain/>

