

Testimony Against HB0317

Honorable Senators

Please vote against HB0317.

This bill seems to be a solution in search of a problem when the State website for Access by Voters with Disabilities seems to address most of the situations described by those who testified in favor of this bill during the House debate. See (<https://www.elections.maryland.gov/voting/accessibility.html>).

Has anyone done a study showing that this service is wanted by a sufficient number of the public and if desired, can curbside voting be done in a cost effective and secure manner? If one receives a ballot by mail, prepares it, and is driven to, or takes public transportation to, a drop box, isn't that essentially "curbside" voting?

This bill does not discuss the logistics of getting the voting equipment setup outside, and the physical security needed to protect the equipment from the elements. The blind may need a ballot marking device that contains a headset and keypad or blind voters and voters with low vision could vote by listening to the ballot selections and by using the keypad. They may also choose to use the high contrast and large print functions of the voting unit. Will these features be usable while sitting in a car or van?

Testimony by the Maryland Association of Electors listed three problems with this bill, which supports my logistics concerns.

Concerns Regarding Technology Compatibility

A significant challenge we face is the lack of compatible technology to efficiently implement curbside voting. Our current ballot marking devices (BMDs) and pollbook printers, while standardized across the state, are not designed for outdoor or mobile use. Unlike the more compact, modern systems used in other states to facilitate curbside voting, our equipment requires substantial logistical adjustments and potential additional investments in new technology to function effectively in this capacity. Additionally, we may need to renegotiate our equipment leases to permit outdoor use.

Unless this bill is tied to a future procurement process that ensures the acquisition of mobile, weather-resistant ballot marking devices and pollbooks, local election officials will face significant operational hurdles. Without appropriate equipment, election staff will be forced to implement costly and inefficient workarounds, increasing the risk of delays, errors, equipment damage and security concerns. Additionally, any new technology must undergo rigorous testing and certification to ensure compliance with state and federal election security standards.

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Election Security, Ballot Integrity and Voter Perception of Security

The prospect of managing loose ballots outside our established zone of control presents a critical concern from an election security standpoint. Maintaining the integrity and secrecy of each vote is paramount, and the transition to curbside voting introduces new vulnerabilities that must be meticulously addressed to prevent any compromise in our electoral process. Beyond logistical challenges, voter perception of security plays a crucial role in public confidence. Any perceived weaknesses—such as ballots being marked or transferred outside a secure polling environment—could undermine trust in the system, regardless of actual security measures in place.

Weather and Space Considerations

The weather variability, particularly during primary and general election seasons, poses an additional operational challenge to curbside voting. Ensuring the safety and comfort of voters and election workers, as well as protecting voting equipment from adverse weather conditions, requires careful planning and additional resources.

To me, it would seem easier to use the "Request a mail-in ballot" process than to be driven to the one site in each of the three counties participating in the curbside voting pilot. One's ballot can be mailed or printed from SBE's website. If one has a disability and cannot mark the ballot independently, SBE offers an online tool to help voters mark their ballot. With this tool, most voters with disabilities can make selections without help. If one would like to use this online tool, one should request a mail-in ballot and check the box saying that you want to print your ballot from SBE's website

In testimony at the Ways and Means hearing, some of the disabled witnesses stated that they wanted to vote at the election sites just like everyone else. Curbside voting does not satisfy their goals because they are not voting inside like everyone else.

One possible solution could have been SB0066 and HB0781, Voting by Elderly Voters and Voters with Disabilities. I testified in-person for both bills. These bills offer a low tech solution in that they give priority to the elderly and disabled so they do not have to stand in line and provide seating inside, so those who have problems standing, can sit until called to move to the next voting station in the process. These bills would have allowed those disabled who testified for HB0317 to vote inside just like everyone else with minimal technical accommodations. I see from the MYMGA database that SB0066 did not appear to pass in the Senate, and HB0781 passed the House with amendments, but did not get pass its Senate hearing on March 1.

I believe the technological and logistic issues as discussed by MAEO outweigh the benefits to set up curbside voting, even in a pilot mode, so please enter an unfavorable report about HB0317

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