



**SB 66: Election Law – Polling Place Procedures – Voting by Elderly Voters and Voters With Disabilities
(Accessible and Expedited Voting Act of Maryland)**

February 5, 2025

Position: Support

The Maryland Down Syndrome Advocacy Coalition (MDAC) is a coalition of the five Down syndrome organizations in Maryland as well as individuals with Down syndrome and their family members who have come together to advocate for improved quality of life for all individuals with Down syndrome throughout the state of Maryland.

MDAC strongly supports SB66, which would require the State Board of Elections to establish guidelines for accommodating and expediting voting for elderly voters and voters for disabilities, require local boards to implement the guidelines and collect feedback from voters, and require the election judge training program to include instruction on best practices for assisting elderly voters and voters with disabilities. This bill speaks directly to one of MDAC's guiding principles: "People with Down syndrome are able to participate in all parts of community life, like voting and speaking out on important issues."

Individuals with disabilities, including those with Down syndrome, face significant barriers to exercising the franchise, including inaccessible polling places, ballots that are not written in plain language, shortages of poll workers and inadequately trained poll workers, and misunderstandings about voter eligibility. SB66 would address some of these barriers and continue to expand voter participation, a core tenet of our democratic society.

Wider knowledge about voter eligibility and the permissible support for voters with disabilities is important and can ensure that every eligible voter exercises their fundamental civil right. In Maryland, voter eligibility extends to those who are under guardianship unless they have been found by a court to be unable to communicate a desire to vote.¹ In addition, a voter may bring someone to assist them in voting as long as that person is not their employer, an officer or agent of their union, or an election challenger or watcher; alternatively, a voter may choose to have two election judges help them. The person providing assistance must sign the Voter Assistance Form and cannot suggest how the person should vote.²

For many people with Down syndrome, the prospects and realities of long lines and crowded polling places are an impediment to voting. Requirements for dedicated, expedited lines; clearly marked signage indicated availability of expedited services; priority seating in waiting areas; and specific provisions for high-traffic early voting centers and polling places would improve the physical accessibility of polling places and enable greater participation in elections. In addition, including instruction for election judges on best practices for assisting voters with disabilities is critically important to ensure that these voters, including those with Down syndrome, can receive accommodations and/or support if and when they wish.

¹ Maryland State Board of Elections, Voter Registration Eligibility, https://elections.maryland.gov/voter_registration/index.html

² Maryland State Board of Elections, Access by Voters with Disabilities, <https://elections.maryland.gov/voting/accessibility.html>

Individuals with Down syndrome are citizens whose voices must be heard at the ballot box and by their elected officials. Improving the accessibility of our voting system is necessary to advance this goal and SB66 is an important step in the right direction.

For these reasons, MDAC strongly supports SB66.

Respectfully submitted,

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