

# **SB838\_The Arc Maryland\_ Oppose.pdf**

Uploaded by: Ande Kolp

Position: UNF

**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.<sup>i</sup> 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  
[akolp@thearcmd.org](mailto:akolp@thearcmd.org)

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandhealth/infographic-disability-impacts-all.html>

# **DRM Testimony - UNF - SB 838 - Absentee Ballots –**

Uploaded by: Gillian Justice

Position: UNF

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

**February 26, 2025**

### **SB 838 – Election Law – Mail-in Voting – Proof of Identity**

**Position: OPPOSE**

Disability Rights Maryland (DRM) is the Protection & Advocacy agency in Maryland, mandated to advance the civil rights of people with disabilities. DRM opposes SB 838, which would require anyone voting by absentee or mail-in ballot to provide a signature on their ballot that matches their registration record. The proposed requirement would create significant potential barriers to voting for Maryland's disability community.

Absentee or mail-in ballots are important options for all voters including individuals with disabilities. In the 2020 general election, 52% of voters with disabilities voted by mail.<sup>1</sup> Due to many voters with disabilities taking advantage of the mail-in ballot system, any change or attempt to restrict this practice will undoubtedly impact Marylanders with disabilities.

Not only does this piece of legislation target a form of voting important to individuals with disabilities, the nature of the restriction to mail-in voting proposed in SB 838 makes voting more inaccessible for many people with disabilities. Signature requirements that compare one's signature at the time of voting to a registration record have been shown to disproportionately delegitimize the vote of individuals with certain disabilities. Individuals with some forms of degenerative diseases, for example, may result in tremors and other symptoms that may cause their signature to change year-to-year.<sup>2</sup> Individuals with visual impairments similarly may have difficulties signing

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<sup>1</sup>[https://www.eac.gov/sites/default/files/document\\_library/files/Fact\\_sheet\\_on\\_disability\\_and\\_voter\\_turnout\\_in\\_2020\\_o.pdf](https://www.eac.gov/sites/default/files/document_library/files/Fact_sheet_on_disability_and_voter_turnout_in_2020_o.pdf)

<sup>2</sup><https://www.aclu.org/news/voting-rights/signature-match-laws-disproportionately-impact-voters-already-margins>

documents consistently.<sup>3</sup> These are just some of the reasons a person with a disability may be unable to produce consistent signatures. If enacted, SB 838 would mean those voter's ballots would be disqualified, a clear form of selective disenfranchisement. When the state of Ohio instituted similar signature matching mandates, 97% of the ballots that were rejected were due to signature mismatching.<sup>4</sup>

Not only do signature matching mandates for voters cause an undue burden on those with disabilities, but the concept also is intended to address a relatively small-scale problem. Research from The Brennan Center for Justice has found the rate of documented voter fraud in the United States is less than 0.0009%.<sup>5</sup> That number is certainly smaller than the 52% of disabled voters whose ballots might be thrown out due to an obscure and uninformative signature requirement.

This piece of legislation provides requirements that would likely serve to throw out the votes of Marylanders with disabilities. The bill takes no consideration of older adult voters and voters with disabilities, nor does it seem to recognize its heavy-handed disenfranchisement of those groups so reliant on mail-in voting. It is for that reason that we respectfully urge you to oppose SB 838.

Please do not hesitate to contact me at [GillianJ@DisabilityRightsMD.org](mailto:GillianJ@DisabilityRightsMD.org) or 443-692-2498 with any questions.

Respectfully submitted,

Gillian Justice  
Community Engagement Coordinator

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<sup>3</sup><https://www.aclu.org/news/disability-rights/new-hampshire-disenfranchised-94-year-old-legally-blind-woman-because-her?redirect=blog%2Fnew-hampshire-disenfranchised-94-year-old-legally-blind-woman-because-her-signature-now-were>

<sup>4</sup><https://lawyerscommittee.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Ohio.pdf>

<sup>5</sup><https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/debunking-voter-fraud-myth>

## Disability Rights Maryland

# **Testimony opposing SB0838 - Election Law - Absente**

Uploaded by: Richard KAP Kaplowitz

Position: UNF

02/26/2025

Richard Keith Kaplowitz  
Frederick, MD 21703

**TESTIMONY ON SB#/0838 - POSITION: UNFAVORABLE**  
**Election Law - Absentee Ballots - Signature Requirements and Verification**

**TO:** Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and members of the Education, Energy and the Environment Committee

**FROM:** Richard Keith Kaplowitz

**My name is Richard Keith Kaplowitz. I am a resident of District 3. I am submitting this testimony opposing SB#/0838, Election Law - Absentee Ballots - Signature Requirements and Verification**

This bill seems to be a response to the disproven accusations of cheating and fraud in the administration of elections in Maryland. The conservative Heritage Foundation found only 10 cases of voter fraud in Maryland between 2012-2023.<sup>1</sup> There were NONE in 2020 where there were 4,109,762 eligible voters.

This bill contemplates prohibiting a local board of elections from removing an absentee ballot from a return envelope or ballot/return envelope or counting the ballot unless the return envelope or ballot/return envelope is signed by the voter and, except under certain circumstances, a witness and the local board verify the voter's signature. What does this do to people such as my fifty-year-old son, a victim of a stroke, whose signature is now left handed and can never match his original right-handed signature for registration at age 16? Or mine, affected by my arthritis in my hand? What problem exists so that this extra burden of work should be placed onto our understaffed and overworked election volunteers and staff of the local elections board?

This bill appears to be driven by a need to attack a non-existent problem for political points among a set of voters and elected officials who continue to promote false narratives around elections and voting. It does nothing to secure our already secure and well-run elections. After millions and millions of votes cast in Maryland a total of 10 cases of fraud do not require this "remedy"!

**I respectfully urge this committee to return an unfavorable report on SB#/0838.**

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<sup>1</sup> <https://electionfraud.heritage.org/search?state=md>



# **Unfavorable SB838 Ballot Signature.pdf**

Uploaded by: Sharon Maneki

Position: UNF

## Unfavorable SB838- Election Law - Absentee Ballots - Signature Requirements and Verification

Date: February 26, 2025

From: National Federation of the Blind of Maryland

15 Charles Plaza, #3002

[President@nfbmd.org](mailto:President@nfbmd.org)

To: Education, Energy and the Environment Committee

The members of the National Federation of the Blind of Maryland urge the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee to vote "Unfavorable" on SB838. If this bill is enacted, it will create additional barriers for voters with disabilities and will be an additional source of discrimination against these voters. It discriminates against persons with disabilities and the elderly. The signature of the voter on the absentee ballot envelope may not be the same as the signature on the voter registration card because for instance blind people cannot duplicate their signature exactly and the signature of an elderly person is not the same through no fault of their own. The aging process is just part of life and your writing changes as you age. People without disabilities do not write the same way and do not have a consistent signature either, so this bill will be difficult to enforce.

Voting is supposed to be barrier free but this bill has many barriers. Getting a witness for the signature will be a burden for persons with disabilities.

SB838 offers a solution to a problem that does not exist. If there is a problem of fraud, where are the statistics to demonstrate it? Making the application to request and submit an absentee ballot so difficult will discourage the applicant from voting. SB838 will be a deterrent to voters.\

Please vote no on SB838.