

HOUSE WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE

January 28, 2025

HB 115 – Election Law – Polling Places – Establishing Voter Identity (Voter Privacy Act of 2025)

Position: OPPOSE

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 opposes HB 115, which would require election judges to request photo identification from voters before they can cast their ballots. Implementing such a requirement would create significant barriers to voting access, disproportionately impacting individuals with disabilities.

Requiring prospective voters to provide identification before casting their ballots creates significant barriers for many Marylanders with disabilities, who are 36% less likely to have a valid government-issued ID.¹ Research from the Brennan Center for Justice demonstrates that such requirements disproportionately burden marginalized communities.² For voters with disabilities, obtaining a new form of ID involves access to transportation to reach an issuing office and the financial means to cover the associated costs.

An ACLU report estimates that obtaining an additional form of identification can cost between \$75 and \$175 per person,³ factoring in travel time, transportation expenses, lost wages, and the price of the ID itself. However, this analysis does not address the unique challenges faced by people with disabilities, such as navigating inaccessible transportation systems or meeting specific mobility and support needs when traveling to these offices.

In Maryland, individuals with disabilities already face significant barriers to transportation and employment, which disproportionately affect their

¹ <https://www.voteriders.org/impact-of-voter-id-laws-on-people-with-disabilities/>

² <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/challenge-obtaining-voter-identification>

³ <https://www.aclu.org/documents/oppose-voter-id-legislation-fact-sheet>

financial stability. Imposing additional costs to participate in the electoral process risks disenfranchising voters with disabilities, undermining their right to vote.

The proposed legislation includes a carve-out allowing voters to present a voter registration card as proof of ID. However, this provision does not address the barriers created by the bill. Obtaining a voter registration card can be a lengthy process, reliant on the efficiency of mail delivery, which can take several weeks. Additionally, there is currently no system in place to track the mailing process, as one might track a package, leaving voters uncertain about the status of their registration card.

The proposed legislation also includes another carve out allowing voters to submit their driver's license if they did not have one of the other forms of identification. However, this provision fails to address the larger issue of barriers created by these requirements. Many individuals with disabilities do not possess driver's licenses due to visual impairments, mobility challenges, or other factors. As a result, this carve-out does little to support voters with disabilities and continues to impose unnecessary barriers to their participation in the electoral process.

Identification mandates for voters, such as those proposed in House Bill 115, impose undue burdens on voters with disabilities while addressing a problem of minimal scale. The Brennan Center for Justice reports in-person voter impersonation nationally in 0.00004% of all ballots cast. This is significantly lower than other forms of voter fraud, which House Bill 115 does not address.⁴ This rate is also significantly lower than the percentage of voters who lack government-issued IDs (4.8%), voters with disabilities who do not have IDs (7.5%), those blocked from voting in states with ID mandates due to having the wrong form of ID (6%), and voters deterred from participating in past elections due to confusion about ID requirements (11.2%).⁵

The proposed bill imposes additional restrictions on a people with disabilities, a group that has faced historical disenfranchisement. Rather than ensuring voters' voices are heard, this bill would have the opposite effect, silencing countless Marylanders who simply wish to exercise their fundamental right to participate in the democratic process.

⁴ <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/debunking-voter-fraud-myth>

⁵ <https://www.voteriders.org/impact-of-voter-id-laws-on-people-with-disabilities/>

Everyone is entitled to their constitutional right to have a voice in their government by way of the ballot box. It is for that reason that we urge you to oppose HB 115.

Respectfully submitted,

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