February 18, 2025

Testimony on HB 781
Election Law – Polling Place Procedures – Voting by Elderly Voters and Voters with Disabilities
(Accessible and Expedited Voting Act of Maryland)
Ways and Means

Position: Favorable

Common Cause Maryland is in support of HB 781, which creates new requirements for local Boards of Elections to expedite voting and provide accommodation for elderly voters and voters with disabilities at each early voting and polling place.

HB 781 is meant to improve and expedite voting process for elderly voters and voter with disabilities, requiring the State Board of Elections to create a process to accommodate them at each Early Voting Center and polling place within the State of Maryland. Improved guidelines include the maintenance of a separate, dedicated line for elderly voters and voters with disabilities and the addition of a waiting area with priority seating for the elderly and disabled. These new standards - along with the pre-existing option to use a "placeholder" in instances where a voter is unable to stand for long periods of time – will go a long way towards making polling and early voting locations as accessible as possible to all voters.

This legislation also improves the process for training election judges on best practices used to assist or accommodate elderly and disabled voters, and requires local Boards of Elections to make clear signage available inside of polling sites that ensure voters are made aware of the assistance available to them when voting. We would ask the Committee to consider translating this signage into any other languages that are spoken widely within the jurisdiction, to ensure that no voter is left behind because they did not understand that there is assistance available to them.

Overall, HB 781 will help ensure future Maryland elections run smoothly, especially for elderly and disabled voters who would like to vote in-person. For these reasons, we request a favorable report.