



Maryland Forward Party

February 7, 2025

Maryland Forward Party

P J Benenati, Chair

(301) 606-3513

pjbenenatimdfwd@gmail.com

HB 0642:

Election Law - Registered Voter List and Petitions
(Ballot Petition Modernization Act)

Position: Favorable

Dear Committee,

I am writing on behalf of the Maryland Forward Party and our 6,000 Maryland supporters. Forward Party is among the fastest growing political organizations in the United States and in Maryland. Our organization is dedicated to protecting and enhancing our democracy and among our core values is our belief that all voices wanting to participate in our political process should be heard.

HB 0642 helps engage more Maryland voters into our democracy. By amending Section 3-506(a), 6-103(a), 6-203, 6-204, 6-210(c), (d), and (e), and 16-401, we are opening the opportunity for more voices to be heard. By reviewing these measures including the requirements for the collection and verification of electronic signatures, and as specifically indicated for those people with disabilities, the State Board of Elections will have the procedures and infrastructure needed to allow for the safe and secure use of electronic signatures for allowed petition use. These measures have already been successfully implemented, during the COVID State of Emergency (SBE Policy 2020-01). These measures



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will continue to provide a durable means for the collection and verification of petition signatures, despite any unforeseen future disturbances to our election process or schedule.

This policy addresses multiple points in the petition process. On the front end it improves the legitimate signature validation rate by allowing voters to use web based electronic signatures, which have a much higher validation rate. It also addresses it in the middle of the process by requiring the state and local boards to use reasonability standards for evaluating names. The current exacting name standard invalidates many potentially legitimate signatures. Finally, by giving voters the ability to correct technical errors, which cause their signature to be invalidated, this bill provides another mechanism for voters to ensure their signatures are counted. This bill modernizes processes in a sensible and measured way that makes it more likely that voters will have their legitimate expressions honored.

Petition ballot measure questions are and should always be an important part of our democracy. Providing easy access to our Maryland residents to gather and share their collective voice has always been a core principle of this state. We hope that as technology and these verification measures undergo updates, that our protected democracy here in Maryland will continue to thrive, as it always has.

Respectfully

PJ Benenati

Maryland Forward Party, Chair

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