

HOUSE WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE

February 18, 2025

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

Position: SUPPORT

Disability Rights Maryland (DRM) is Maryland’s designated protection and advocacy organization, dedicated to advancing the rights of Marylanders with disabilities. DRM works to increase opportunities for Marylanders with disabilities to be part of their communities through voting by advocating for equal access to the ballot box.

DRM supports HB 781, which requires the State Board of Elections to establish guidelines for local boards of election in support of older adults and individuals with disabilities who seek to engage in the voting process. This bill will require local election boards to seek feedback from voters with disabilities to identify and address barriers to access. By mandating the State Board of Elections to establish clear guidelines, the bill ensures that local boards implement consistent processes to accommodate and expedite voting for individuals at early voting centers and polling places. This commitment to accessibility will help improve the voting experience for people with disabilities.

Over the past few election cycles, the number of voters with disabilities has continued to grow as access to the ballot box expands.¹ With 40.2 million eligible voters with disabilities in 2024, election policies must accommodate individuals with disabilities. House Bill 781 aligns with this goal by providing expedited voting options, priority seating, and improved election worker training, which all could contribute to improved access to voting for people with disabilities.²

As more Americans with disabilities engage in voting, it is essential to establish clear requirements for election poll workers to effectively meet the

¹ <https://www.eac.gov/news/2021/07/07/new-data-177-million-americans-disabilities-voted-2020-significant-increase-over>.

² https://smlr.rutgers.edu/sites/default/files/Documents/Centers/Program_Disability_Research/Disability_Electorate_Projections_Report_Oct2024.pdf.

needs of all voters. During the last election cycle, DRM received reports from community members regarding their interactions with poll workers across the state. In response, DRM has worked with the State Board of Elections to share these concerns and identify areas for improvement. Through these discussions, it has become evident that poll workers are open to receiving guidance on best practices for assisting voters with disabilities.

Providing clear, standardized training and guidelines will equip election workers with the knowledge and confidence needed to ensure a smooth and accessible voting experience. Additionally, requiring local election boards to collect and review feedback from voters will help identify challenges and improve access for individuals with disabilities.

DRM supports this legislation intended to support individuals with disabilities. We are able, should the State Board of Elections need technical assistance, guidance or resources, to provide support with the establishment of the proposed guidelines.

Respectfully submitted,

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