



TO: House Ways & Means Committee
FROM: LeadingAge Maryland
SUBJECT: House Bill 781, Election Law - Polling Place Procedures - Voting by Elderly Voters and Voters With Disabilities (Accessible and Expedited Voting Act of Maryland)
DATE: February 18, 2025
POSITION: Favorable

LeadingAge Maryland supports House Bill 781, Election Law - Polling Place Procedures - Voting by Elderly Voters and Voters With Disabilities (Accessible and Expedited Voting Act of Maryland)

LeadingAge Maryland is a community of more than 140 not-for-profit aging services organizations serving residents and clients through continuing care retirement communities, affordable senior housing, assisted living, nursing homes and home and community-based services. Members of LeadingAge Maryland provide health care, housing, and services to more than 20,000 older persons each year. Our mission is to be the trusted voice for aging in Maryland, and our vision is that Maryland is a state where older adults have access to the services they need, when they need them, in the place they call home. We partner with consumers, caregivers, researchers, public agencies, faith communities and others who care about aging in Maryland. LeadingAge Maryland represents the vast majority of CCRCs in the state.

House Bill 781 improves voting accessibility and expedite the voting process for older voters and voters with disabilities in Maryland. The bill requires the State Board of Elections to establish guidelines for local boards to implement a process to accommodate and expedite voting for these groups at each early voting center and polling place.

LeadingAge Maryland recognizes the importance of ensuring that all individuals, regardless of age or ability, have equal access to the democratic process. This bill takes a crucial step towards achieving that goal by requiring the State Board of Elections to establish guidelines for local boards to implement a process to accommodate and expedite voting for elderly voters and voters with disabilities at each early voting center and polling place.

We applaud the bill's sponsors for their efforts to address the barriers that often prevent older voters and voters with disabilities from exercising their right to vote. By providing dedicated expedited lines, clearly marked signage, priority seating, and specific provisions for

high-traffic early voting centers and polling places, this bill will help to ensure that these individuals can cast their ballots with dignity and ease. Furthermore, we appreciate the bill's emphasis on collecting feedback from older voters and voters with disabilities and making immediate adjustments to the process as necessary. This will help to identify and address any challenges that may arise during implementation and ensure that the accommodations and expedited voting process are effective and efficient.

LeadingAge Maryland is compelled to raise one objection with the bill. And, that is the term used "elderly adults." The term "elderly adults" is often considered ageist because it carries connotations of frailty, decline, and dependency, reinforcing negative stereotypes about aging. It can marginalize individuals by implying that age alone defines their abilities or social contributions. In contrast, "older adults" is a more neutral and respectful term that simply acknowledges age without attaching limiting assumptions. This language promotes dignity and recognizes that aging is a diverse experience, with individuals maintaining varying levels of health, independence, and engagement in society. By using "older adults" instead of "elderly adults," we foster more inclusive and respectful discourse around aging.

For these reasons, LeadingAge Maryland respectfully requests a favorable report on House Bill 781.

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