

BENJAMIN BROOKS
Legislative District 10
Baltimore County

Education, Energy, and the
Environment Committee

Energy Subcommittee

Chair, Joint Electric Universal
Service Program Workgroup



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TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 929
Workgroup on Mail – In Ballot Accessibility

Ways and Means Committee
March 25, 2025

Chair Atterbeary, Vice-Chair Wilkins, and members of this committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you on SB 929, Workgroup on Mail-In Ballot Accessibility. The purpose of this bill is to enhance accessibility and equity in Maryland's voting process by establishing a workgroup dedicated to examining and improving mail-in ballot accessibility, particularly for voters with disabilities. This initiative aims to ensure that all voters, regardless of their physical abilities, have the opportunity to participate fully and independently in the democratic process.

Voting is a fundamental right, and equal access to voting methods is essential to maintaining a fair and inclusive democracy. However, our current procedures for voting unfairly disadvantage those who are blind, low vision, print disabled, have hand dexterity limitations, or cannot return a ballot privately and independently. Currently, an estimated 235,930 voters or 3.8% of Maryland's population have a disability which may affect their ability to fill out a paper ballot or return a ballot on election day. People with print disabilities often must return their ballot at the cost of losing privacy and ballot secrecy. Their ballot can be marked online but must be printed and signed before it can be sent by mail or dropped in a ballot box. They require assistance from another person in finding where to sign their ballot and preparing it for delivery by mail or drop box. Those who assist voters with disabilities can see for whom the vote was cast, which is inconsistent with voter privacy and independence principles. In addition, because their ballots are neither private nor independent, they are susceptible to tampering and suspicious altering, here again, inconsistent with the voter's preferences.

This bill seeks to address these challenges by establishing a dedicated Workgroup on Mail-In Ballot Accessibility, which will examine current processes and evaluate secure, accessible alternatives. The workgroup will include a diverse membership, including representatives from state agencies, disability advocacy organizations, and experts in voting accessibility, election security, and cybersecurity. This diversified representation will ensure a comprehensive examination of accessibility issues while maintaining the integrity and security of the voting process.

SB 929 tasks the workgroup with examining current mail-in ballot return processes, as well as, identifying barriers faced by voters with disabilities. It will assess the impact of requiring paper-based ballot returns on voters with disabilities, including potential discrimination and challenges to privacy and independence. The workgroup will also collect information on best practices and standards for accessible mail-in voting alternatives in other jurisdictions. Additionally, it will evaluate alternatives to paper-based ballot returns by considering factors such as accessibility, security, privacy, cost, and implementation feasibility. To ensure a well-rounded approach to accessibility and security, the workgroup will consult with additional subject matter experts.

By carefully assessing these areas, the workgroup will provide data-driven recommendations to enhance mail-in ballot accessibility while safeguarding election security and voter integrity. This proactive approach will allow Maryland to lead the way in ensuring that all voters, including those with disabilities, can exercise their right to vote independently and privately.

The establishment of the Workgroup on Mail-In Ballot Accessibility is a critical step toward achieving equity in our electoral process. The insights gained and recommendations developed by the workgroup will guide the state in implementing effective, secure, and accessible mail-in voting options for all Maryland residents.

For these reasons, I am requesting a favorable report on SB 929.

With kindest regards,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Benjamin T. Brooks". The ink is dark and the signature is fluid, with a prominent loop at the end of the last name.

Benjamin Brooks