

**Testimony Before the House Ways and Means Committee
February 18, 2025**

House Bill 781

**Election Law - Polling Place Procedures - Voting by Elderly Voters and Voters with Disabilities
Accessible and Expedited Voting Act of Maryland**

**** Support ****

The National Association of Social Workers is the largest professional association of social workers in the country, and the Maryland Chapter represents social workers across the state. On behalf of the NASW-MD's Committee on Aging, we urgently and wholeheartedly support House Bill 781 - Election Law - Polling Place Procedures - Voting by Elderly Voters and Voters With Disabilities (Accessible and Expedited Voting Act of Maryland).

This bill addresses a pressing and fundamental issue: Ensuring that elderly voters and voters with disabilities can exercise their constitutional right to vote without the physical, logistical, and systemic barriers that too often prevent their full participation. Voting is not merely a procedural activity; it is a cornerstone of our democracy.

Currently, too many Marylanders face significant obstacles at polling places. Long lines, inaccessible entrances, and insufficient support for mobility or sensory impairments disproportionately exclude older adults and individuals with disabilities. This exclusion is not hypothetical - it's happening now. A 2020 U.S. Government Accountability Office report revealed that 60% of polling places nationwide had accessibility issues. In Maryland, these barriers directly affect nearly one in four residents living with a disability and a rapidly growing population of older adults, which has increased by over 30% in the past decade.

House Bill 781 directly tackles these inequities by:

- Mandating accessible and prioritized entrances and paths of travel;
- Establishing expedited voting areas and times for elderly voters and voters with disabilities; and
- Requiring robust training for election workers to ensure respectful, effective support for these populations.

These are not merely improvements; they are essential changes to ensure our democracy includes every voice.

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For many older adults and individuals with disabilities, these barriers are more than inconveniences - they are disenfranchising. Imagine a voter in a wheelchair unable to navigate a polling place or a senior with limited mobility forced to wait hours in line. These stories are not uncommon, and they represent a profound failure to uphold the dignity and rights of these Marylanders.

Maryland has the opportunity, and the responsibility, to lead the way. By enacting House Bill 781, we can ensure that our elections reflect the principles of accessibility, equity, and respect for all. The time to act is now. We urge you to issue a favorable report on House Bill 781 and ensure that no voter is left behind. Thank you for your leadership in protecting the rights of all Marylanders.

Respectfully,

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