

HB 1097: Workgroup on Mail-In Ballot Accessibility

SUPPORT

House Ways & Means Committee, February 24, 2025

Chair Atterbeary and members of the Ways & Means Committee:

My name is Lorna-Mae Silcott, and I am a person with a visual disability. I am testifying in support of House Bill 1097, which would establish the Workgroup on Mail-In Ballot Accessibility.

Importance of Accessible Mail-In Ballots

Voting is a fundamental right of every citizen, and it is essential that all eligible voters have equal access to the ballot box. For individuals with disabilities, this can be particularly challenging when it comes to mail-in voting. Current processes may present barriers to participation, such as difficulties with paper ballots, signature requirements, or returning ballots independently.

Need for a Workgroup

House Bill 1097 recognizes the importance of addressing these challenges by creating a workgroup specifically tasked with examining mail-in ballot accessibility for voters with disabilities.

This workgroup will play a crucial role in:

- **Assessing the impact:** The workgroup will evaluate how current mail-in ballot processes affect voters with disabilities, identifying specific barriers and areas for improvement.
- **Exploring alternatives:** The workgroup will research and collect information about existing accessible alternatives to paper mail-in ballot return, such as electronic ballot delivery and return systems.
- **Evaluating options:** The workgroup will carefully evaluate these alternatives, considering factors such as security, privacy, cost, and usability for individuals with various disabilities.

Benefits of the Workgroup

By establishing this workgroup, we can ensure that:

- **All voices are heard:** The workgroup will provide a platform for voters with disabilities, disability advocates, and election officials to share their experiences and perspectives.

- **Data-driven solutions:** The workgroup's research and evaluation will provide a solid foundation for developing evidence-based recommendations to improve mail-in ballot accessibility.
- **Timely action:** The bill requires the workgroup to submit its findings and recommendations by December 31, 2025, ensuring that this important issue is addressed promptly.

Conclusion

I urge you to **support** House Bill 1097 and I request a favorable vote. By establishing the Workgroup on Mail-In Ballot Accessibility, we can take a significant step towards ensuring that all voters, including those with disabilities, have the opportunity to exercise their right to vote.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Lorna-Mae Silcott
Frederick, Maryland