

**SENATE WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE**

**January 14, 2025**

**HB 52 – Election Law – Voting Age – Board of Education Elections**

**Position: SUPPORT**

Disability Rights Maryland (DRM) is the Protection & Advocacy agency in Maryland, federally mandated to advance the civil rights of people with disabilities. DRM works to increase opportunities for Marylanders with disabilities to be part of their communities through voting by advocating for equal and equitable access to the ballot box.

DRM supports HB 52, which authorizes Maryland counties to lower the age at which an individual may vote in an election for members of their county board of education. Lowering the voting age for county board of education elections will increase understanding of how the electoral process works for all students. Students with disabilities are uniquely poised to benefit from the passage of this bill by exposing them to the electoral process prior to them turning the age of 18. Given the general lack of awareness surrounding the voting rights for individuals with disabilities, supporting students to engage in the process earlier will inevitably lead to a greater understanding of the supports and voting methods available to members of Maryland's disability community.

Over the last few years, we have seen an increase in the number of voters with disabilities. In 2020, 62% of voters with disabilities cast a ballot, compared to 2016 where 56% of voters with disabilities cast a ballot.<sup>1</sup> We can attribute this increase to the expansion of the variety of methods to cast

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

a ballot in our state, the strengthening of our mail-in ballot voting process, and the continued growing awareness of voting rights for individuals with disabilities. The passage of HB 52 will continue to build upon the efforts to improve access to the electoral process for individuals with disabilities and further expand democracy within the state.

Students with disabilities will benefit greatly from the passage of HB 52. As of 2022, over 106,000 students in Maryland have been identified as having a disability, 12% of the student population.<sup>2</sup> This bill will provide students with disabilities the ability to determine what supports they may need to access the ballot box prior to engaging in the full-fledged electoral process upon turning 18. Students with disabilities will be given the opportunity to assess the need for transportation support to get to a polling location, experience interactions with poll workers, use the paper ballot or ballot marking device, and further determine what kinds of support they may need from family members or election officials to partake in the electoral process. Providing students the opportunity to engage in this process prior to turning 18 will ensure young Marylanders, including those with disabilities, are poised and prepared to engage in the formal electoral process upon reaching the authorized voting age.

We are available should the State Board of Elections need technical assistance, guidance, or resources in implementing this legislation in Maryland.

For these reasons, we urge a favorable report on HB 52. Please do not hesitate to contact me at [BradenS@DisabilityRightsMD.org](mailto:BradenS@DisabilityRightsMD.org), or by phone at 410-727-6859.

Respectfully submitted,

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<sup>2</sup> <https://marylandpublicschools.org/stateboard/Documents/2023/0228/DeepDiveStudentsWithDisabilitiesPart2.pdf>

Braden Stinar, Esq.  
Attorney  
Disability Rights Maryland