



Empowering People to Lead Systemic Change

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## **HOUSE WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE**

**January 28, 2025**

**HB 67 – Election Law – Mail-in Voting – Proof of Identity**

**Position: OPPOSE**

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 respectfully opposes HB 67, which would require anyone voting by absentee or mail-in ballot to provide a signature on their ballot that matches their registration record. The proposed requirement would create significant potential barriers to voting for Maryland's disability community.

It's first important to understand that mail-in ballots are essential for voters with disabilities to make their voices heard. In the 2020 general election, 52% of voters with disabilities voted by mail.<sup>1</sup> Due to many voters with disabilities taking advantage of the mail-in ballot system, any change or attempt to restrict this practice will disproportionately impact Maryland's disability community.

Not only does this piece of legislation target a form of voting uniquely relied upon by the disability community, the nature of the restriction to mail-in voting proposed in HB 67 is, in it of itself, discriminatory. Signature requirements that compare one's signature at the time of voting to a registration record have long been shown to disproportionately delegitimize

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<sup>1</sup>[https://www.eac.gov/sites/default/files/document\\_library/files/Fact\\_sheet\\_on\\_disability\\_and\\_voter\\_turnout\\_in\\_2020\\_o.pdf](https://www.eac.gov/sites/default/files/document_library/files/Fact_sheet_on_disability_and_voter_turnout_in_2020_o.pdf)

the vote of individuals with certain disabilities. Individuals with some forms of degenerative diseases, for example, may result in tremors and other symptoms that may cause their signature to change year-to-year.<sup>2</sup> Individuals with visual impairment similarly may have a hard time signing documents consistently.<sup>3</sup> These are just a few of the reasons someone with a disability may be unable to produce consistent signatures. If enacted, HB 67 would mean those voter's ballots would be disqualified, a clear form of selective disenfranchisement. When the state of Ohio instituted similar signature matching mandates, 97% of the ballots that were rejected were due to signature mismatching.<sup>4</sup>

Not only do signature matching mandates for voters cause an undue burden on those with disabilities, but the concept also is intended to address a relatively small-scale problem. Research from The Brennan Center for Justice has found the rate of documented voter fraud in the United States is less than 0.0009%.<sup>5</sup> That number is certainly smaller than the 52% of disabled voters whose ballots might be thrown out due to an obscure and uninformative signature requirement.

This piece of legislation fails to address any pressing concern of Maryland's election security, and provides a sweeping, inexact restriction that would serve to throw out the votes of a historically marginalized group of Marylanders. The bill takes no consideration of older adult voters and voters with disabilities, nor does it seem to recognize its heavy-handed disenfranchisement of those groups so reliant on mail-in voting.

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<sup>2</sup><https://www.aclu.org/news/voting-rights/signature-match-laws-disproportionately-impact-voters-already-margins>

<sup>3</sup><https://www.aclu.org/news/disability-rights/new-hampshire-disenfranchised-94-year-old-legally-blind-woman-because-her?redirect=blog%2Fnew-hampshire-disenfranchised-94-year-old-legally-blind-woman-because-her-signature-now-were>

<sup>4</sup><https://lawyerscommittee.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Ohio.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/debunking-voter-fraud-myth>

Everyone is entitled the constitutional right to have a voice in their government by way of ballot. It is for that reason that we respectfully urge you to oppose HB 67.

Please do not hesitate to contact me at [BradenS@DisabilityRightsMD.org](mailto:BradenS@DisabilityRightsMD.org) or 410-929-6859 with any questions.

Respectfully submitted,

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Disability Rights Maryland