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OF THE BLIND
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To: Senate Energy, Education, and the Environment Committee

The members of the National Federation of the Blind of Maryland urge the Senate Energy, Education, and the Environment Committee to give a favorable report to SB0727 –Municipal Elections – Qualified Electronic Transmission Systems – Authorization for Use.

The National Federation of the Blind of Maryland is the State’s oldest and largest civil rights organization of and for blind, low vision, and deaf-blind Marylanders. We represent voters across the State who are committed to full participation in every aspect of civic life — including the fundamental right to vote.

This bill authorizes municipalities to conduct municipal elections using a “qualified electronic transmission system.” The bill defines such a system as one that allows an eligible voter to receive, mark, and return a ballot electronically while incorporating robust security protections, including:

- Security auditability
- End-to-end encryption
- End-to-end verifiability
- Multifactor authentication
- Air-gapping
- A process for printing decrypted ballots to create a paper record
- Biometric or equivalent digital identity verification.

The bill further prohibits municipalities from using information received through the system for any purpose other than election administration and voter participation statistics.

In short, This bill permits municipalities — but does not require them — to adopt a secure electronic transmission option with clear statutory guardrails.

Voting is a fundamental right. Equal access to voting methods is essential to maintaining a fair and inclusive democracy. Yet many blind and print-disabled voters continue to face structural barriers to fully private and independent participation.

According to the U.S. Election Assistance Commission, 20% of voters with disabilities report difficulty voting due to accessibility barriers, compared to just 6% of voters without disabilities. In Maryland, more than 235,000 voters — approximately 3.8% of the population — have a disability that may affect their ability to complete or return a paper ballot independently.

While in-person voting often includes accessible ballot marking devices, municipal elections frequently operate differently from State-run elections. Some municipalities rely heavily on paper-based processes or absentee-style voting systems that may not offer the same accessibility infrastructure as statewide elections.

For blind voters, electronic ballot delivery alone is not enough. If a voter can receive and mark a ballot electronically but must then print, sign, and return it physically, independence is lost. Many blind voters do not have printers. Many cannot independently verify a signature line. Many must rely on family members, neighbors, or friends — sacrificing ballot secrecy and privacy in the process.

No other demographic group is asked to surrender privacy and independence in order to vote. Voters with disabilities should not be treated differently.

This bill creates a lawful pathway for municipalities to implement secure systems that allow voters to receive, mark, and return ballots electronically — while maintaining paper records and strong auditability safeguards.

The National Federation of the Blind of Maryland takes election security seriously. Accessibility and security are not opposing values; they must coexist. This bill explicitly requires:

- End-to-end encryption
- End-to-end verifiability

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- Multifactor authentication
- Air-gapped systems
- A paper record created by printing decrypted ballots. These protections reflect modern best practices in secure electronic systems and address common concerns about integrity and auditability. Moreover, by requiring a printed paper record, the bill ensures that ballots can be audited and recounted just like traditional paper ballots. The prohibition on secondary use of voter information further protects voter privacy.

This bill is not a mandate for universal internet voting. It is an authorization for municipalities to adopt a qualified, secure, statutorily defined system if they choose — with explicit security parameters written into law.

The Mobile Voting Project and other accessibility-focused initiatives across the country have demonstrated that secure electronic ballot return systems can be designed with layered protections, identity verification safeguards, and audit mechanisms. Several states already permit electronic ballot return for certain voter populations, including military and overseas voters. A growing number have extended such systems to voters with disabilities. Municipal elections, which are often smaller in scale, can serve as responsible pilot environments for carefully designed, secure systems. This bill provides the statutory framework necessary to allow municipalities to innovate responsibly while maintaining voter protections.

For blind and print-disabled voters, the question is not one of convenience — it is one of equality. If a municipality adopts a voting method that is technologically capable of being made accessible but fails to do so, voters with disabilities are effectively excluded or forced to rely on assistance.

We would not tolerate a polling place without a ramp. We should not tolerate voting systems that deny private and independent access when secure technological solutions exist. This Bill gives municipalities the legal authority to remove those barriers.

This legislation reflects a balanced approach — one that embraces innovation without sacrificing security.

For these reasons, on behalf of the National Federation of the Blind of Maryland, I respectfully ask for a favorable report on SB0727. For questions, please contact me at President@nfbmd.org or at 443-426-4110.

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