



Education, Energy, and the Environment

FROM: People on The Go Maryland

Written by: Mat Rice

Senate Bill 567 Elections In-Person Voting Proof of Identity

Date: Hearing 2/25 at 1:00 p.m.

Sponsored by:

Senators Ready, Bailey, Carozza, Corderman, Folden, Gallion, Hershey, Jennings, Mautz, McKay, Salling, Simonaire, and West

POSITION: Opposed

TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION TO SENATE BILL 567

Honorable Chair Person and Members of the Committee,

We are People on the Go Maryland, a statewide self-advocacy and systems advocacy organization run by and for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. We are writing today to respectfully ask you to oppose Senate Bill 567.

Voting is one of our most important rights as Americans. It is how we make our voices heard and how we participate in our democracy. But Senate Bill 567 would make it much harder for people with disabilities, people of color, and new Americans to vote. This bill would create barriers that many of us simply cannot overcome.

Why This Bill Hurts People with Disabilities

Many people with intellectual and developmental disabilities do not have a driver's license. We may not drive, or we may use other forms of transportation. Getting a state ID card is not easy. It means going to the Motor Vehicle Administration, which can be far away and hard to get to. It means filling out complicated forms. It means finding documents like birth certificates that we may not have or know how to get.

Research shows that many people with disabilities do not have the kind of photo ID this bill requires. In fact, voter turnout among citizens with disabilities is already 11 percentage points lower than people without disabilities. This bill would make that gap even bigger.

The bill says we could use two other documents instead of a photo ID, like a utility bill or bank statement. But many of us do not have these documents in our own names. Many people with disabilities live in group homes where the utilities are in the name of the organization. Many of us do not have bank accounts or get paper statements. Many of us do not get paychecks because we are not working or we use direct deposit. This means the "alternative" option is not really an alternative at all.

If we cannot show the right ID, this bill says we have to vote using a provisional ballot. Provisional ballots are more complicated. We would have to fill out extra paperwork and may need to provide documents later for our vote to count. Many provisional ballots are rejected for technical reasons. This creates a two-tier system where some people's votes are treated as less important than others.

Why This Bill Hurts Communities of Color

This bill would also create serious barriers for Black, Latino, and other communities of color. Research shows that 21% of Black Americans and 23% of Hispanic Americans do not have a driver's license, compared to only 8% of white Americans. This is not an accident—it is the result of historical discrimination and ongoing inequality.

Getting the documents needed for an ID costs money. Birth certificates can cost \$50 or more. For families living paycheck to paycheck, this is a significant burden. Many elderly Black Americans were born during segregation and were never given birth certificates because they were born at home or denied access to hospitals. These historical injustices make it impossible for some people to get the ID this bill requires.

Studies show that strict photo ID laws widen the racial turnout gap. In states with these requirements, Latino voter turnout dropped by more than 10 percentage points. This is voter suppression, plain and simple. It echoes the poll taxes and literacy tests that were used to keep Black Americans from voting during Jim Crow.

Why This Bill Hurts New Americans

Naturalized citizens—people who came to America and became citizens—are full Americans with the same right to vote as anyone born here. But this bill would make it harder for them to exercise that right.

When someone first becomes a citizen, they may not yet have a driver's license or state ID. Getting these documents takes time. Their naturalization certificate may not be accepted under this bill. Many new citizens live with family members or sponsors, so utility bills are not in their names. They may use money transfer services instead of banks, so they do not have bank statements.

Names can also be a problem. Someone's name on their naturalization papers may not match exactly with other documents because of marriage, cultural naming practices, or how names are translated from other languages. This bill could cause election officials to reject valid identification because of small differences in spelling.

The Problem This Bill Claims to Fix Does Not Exist

The supporters of this bill say it is needed to prevent voter fraud. But in-person voter fraud—where someone pretends to be another person at the polls—is extremely rare. A comprehensive investigation in Georgia looked at 25 years of elections and found zero cases where non-citizens successfully voted. A study in North Carolina found that out of 4.8 million ballots cast, only 41 were cast by people who were not yet citizens, and this did not affect any election results.

This bill is a solution in search of a problem. It would block thousands of eligible voters from casting their ballots to prevent a type of fraud that almost never happens.

Recommendation

People with disabilities fought hard for the right to vote. The Americans with Disabilities Act says we must have equal access to voting. People of color fought and died for the right to vote. The Voting Rights Act was passed to protect that right. And naturalized citizens earned the right to vote when they became Americans.

Senate Bill 567 would take us backward. It would create barriers that many of us cannot overcome. It would make our democracy less inclusive and less fair. It would silence voices that need to be heard.

We respectfully recommend you to oppose this legislation. We respectfully recommend that you do not support Senate Bill 567. Please stand with people with disabilities, communities of color, and all Marylanders who believe that voting should be easier, not harder.

Thank you for considering our testimony.

Respectfully submitted,

Executive Director

Mat Rice

Phone: 401.925.5706

Email: mat@pogmd.org