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Legislative District 10
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Education, Energy, and the
Environment Committee

Energy Subcommittee

Chair, Joint Electric Universal
Service Program Workgroup



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TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 901
Election Law – Telephone Voting System - Requirements
Education, Energy and the Environment Committee
February 25, 2026

Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on SB 901, Election Law – Telephone Voting System. This bill requires the Maryland State Board of Elections to select, certify, and acquire a telephone voting system to facilitate absentee voting for qualified voters who have a print disability, a condition that prevents a person from reading, holding, or processing standard printed materials in their original format.

The U.S. Election Commission found that 20% of voters with disabilities had trouble voting on election day due to accessibility, compared to 6% of voters without disabilities. Currently, an estimated 235,930 voters, or 3.8% of Maryland's population, have a disability which may affect their ability to fill out a paper ballot or return a ballot on election day.

People with print disabilities are often forced to give up ballot privacy and secrecy in order to vote. While Maryland's absentee voting process allows these voters to receive a ballot electronically and use their own technology to mark it, they must still print, sign, and return the ballot by mail or drop box. Many voters with print disabilities cannot complete these steps without assistance. As a result, they must rely on another person to print the ballot, locate the signature line, and prepare it for return, if such assistance is even available.

For those who do receive help, the consequences can be significant. Some voters do not want family members or friends to know how they voted, while others report being pressured to change their selections after their ballot is seen. Because the ballot is neither private nor independently cast, and because the assisting individual often has the last physical access to the ballot, voters cannot verify that their choices were submitted as intended. This creates an inequitable system in which voters with print disabilities must sacrifice privacy and independence to participate in democracy, something we do not require of any other group and should not require of voters with disabilities.

SB 901 addresses a critical accessibility gap in Maryland's election law by giving voters with print disabilities a secure way to vote independently and privately. While accessible options exist for in-person and mail-in voting, a telephone voting system offers a direct alternative for

eligible voters who cannot effectively use those formats. This targeted option ensures full participation in the democratic process without reliance on third-party assistance.

At the same time, evaluating new voting technology should include careful consideration of election integrity, voter confidence, and overall system security. SB 901 recognizes these concerns and includes important guardrails. Under the bill, the State Board of Elections would be responsible for placing eligible voters on a telephone voting system list, communicating system details in advance of elections, and conducting voter education so that the public understands how and when the system can be used. Further, it requires they integrate ballots cast through the system into existing absentee ballot canvassing procedures and guarantees that the system remains disconnected from the internet. These requirements ensure that accessibility is expanded in a controlled and responsible manner.

Importantly, SB 901 does not create open or universal telephone voting. Instead, it establishes a narrowly tailored accessibility option under the oversight of the State Board, consistent with existing absentee voting safeguards and standards. By pairing access with certification, testing, and oversight, the bill advances both inclusion and election security.

SB 901 reflects the principle that accessibility and election integrity are not competing goals. With appropriate safeguards in place, Maryland can expand access to the ballot while maintaining public trust in our election system.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge a **favorable report** on SB 901.

With kindest regards,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Benjamin T. Brooks".

Benjamin Brooks