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**SB948 Testimony: Internet-Delivered Ballots**

Education, Energy, and the Environment (& Elections!) Committee

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Internet-delivered ballots hypothetically makes voting more accessible. In practice, they present real problems. The return rate for these ballots is only 39%-- compared with 70% for mail-in ballots.

Given the name, many voters assume they can submit a ballot entirely online. In reality, they must complete a detailed, multi-step, paper-based process. Faced with this, some voters give up, while others cast provisional ballots at the polls-- an outcome that is frustrating and burdens Local Boards of Elections.

In a world where we shop, bank, and even date online, it is understandable that Marylanders might expect to vote online as well. However, many do not realize how complicated the current process actually is. The Maryland State Board of Elections uses [ten steps and a full guidebook](#)-- 20 pages long-- to teach voters how to complete an Internet-delivered ballot. In general, a voter must:

- Have access to a printer and toner cartridge;
- Print and complete the ballot;
- Find a number 10 envelope (business-sized) and address it correctly;
- Pay for first-class postage if mailing the ballot (unlike mail-in ballots, voters using Internet-delivered ballots must pay their own postage); and
- Ensure the ballot is delivered to a post office to be postmarked no later than Election Day **or** deposit it in an official ballot drop-off box.

When thousands of these Internet-delivered ballots arrive at our Local Boards of Elections:

- The envelope must be opened;
- Because regular paper can't be scanned, the ballot must be manually duplicated and verified by bipartisan teams; and
- Only then can the ballot be scanned and tabulated.

This time-consuming process adds significant administrative burdens and costs while increasing the risk of missing certification deadlines.

SB948 would require that application for an Internet-delivered ballot clearly explain each step required to complete, return, and process it. Voters would be required to affirm their understanding before selecting this option. Instead of automatically receiving Internet-delivered ballots in future elections, voters would need to affirmatively opt in each election cycle.

Internet-delivered ballots are a useful tool for those who need it, but the significantly lower return rate shows that relying on them as a recurring voting method risks disenfranchising voters. Educating voters about the realities and limitations of this process is essential.

**NOTE:** We are proposing amendments clarifying that these ballots must be affirmatively selected each election cycle and renaming them “Print at home” ballots to reduce confusion and improve voter understanding.

I respectfully urge a favorable report on SB948.