



Empowering People to Lead Systemic Change

1500 Union Ave., Suite 2000, Baltimore, MD 21211

Phone: 410-727-6352 | Fax: 410-727-6389

DisabilityRightsMD.org

**SENATE EDUCATION, ENERGY, AND THE ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE
SB 73: Election Law – Polling Place Procedures – Voting by Elderly
Voters and Voters with Disabilities**

(Accessible and Expedited Voting Act of Maryland)

February 11, 2026

Position: SUPPORT

Disability Rights Maryland (DRM), is the federally-mandated Protection and Advocacy agency of Maryland, charged with defending and advancing the rights of people with disabilities. DRM submits this testimony in support of SB 73, which strengthens accessible and expedited voting for older adult voters and voters with disabilities.

DRM strongly supports SB 73, which requires the State Board of Elections (SBE) to establish guidelines for local boards of election to better support of older adults and voters with disabilities in the voting process. The bill requires local election boards to seek feedback from voters with disabilities to identify and address barriers to access. By mandating clear statewide guidelines, SB 73 ensures that local boards implement consistent processes to accommodate and expedite voting at early voting centers and polling places. This ongoing commitment to accessibility will improve the voting experience of each election cycle, fostering greater participation in the electoral process.

Over the past few election cycles, voter participation among people with disabilities has continued to grow as access to the ballot box expands. In 2020, 62 percent of individuals with a disability turned out to vote, an

increase from 56 percent in 2016.¹ With an estimated 40.2 million eligible voters with disabilities in 2024, representing nearly one in six voters, election policies must consider accessibility to ensure participation. SB 73 advances this goal by providing expedited voting options, priority seating, and improved election worker training, all of which can help further reduce barriers to access.²

As more Americans with disabilities continue to engage in the electoral process, it is imperative to include specific requirements for election judges to follow to support these voters. SB 73 strengthens the election judge training program by requiring the SBE to include instruction on best practices for assisting older adult voters and voters with disabilities. Well-trained election judges are critical to ensuring that accessibility policies are implemented effectively and respectfully at polling places. Clear and consistent training helps prevent confusion, reduces the risk of improper denial of assistance, and promotes compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

The guidelines for local boards to implement set forth under the bill to accommodate and expedite voting include dedicated expedited lines, clearly marked signage, priority seating, and specific provisions for high-traffic locations. DRM encourages the consideration of additional guidelines, such as communication support, including sign language interpreters or real-time captioning for voters with hearing disabilities, and visual aids or plain language instructions for voters with cognitive disabilities, to ensure that all voters with disabilities can participate independently

¹ <https://www.eac.gov/news/2021/07/07/new-data-177-million-americans-disabilitiesvoted2020-significant-increase-over>.

² https://smlr.rutgers.edu/sites/default/files/Documents/Centers/Program_Disability_Research/Disability_Electorate_Projections_Report_Oct2024.pdf.

Further, SB 73 also requires local boards of elections to implement the State Board's accessibility guidelines and to collect feedback from older adult voters and voters with disabilities while voting is in progress. Local boards must make immediate adjustments as needed to ensure the accommodation and expedited voting process work effectively in real time. SBE is tasked with monitoring implementation and reporting annually to the General Assembly, including challenges, effectiveness, voter feedback, and recommendations for improvement. DRM supports this framework, as it allows issues to be addressed in real time for voters, and also works to resolve issues for future elections.

DRM is excited to see this legislation aimed at supporting older adults and community members with disabilities. We are available to provide technical assistance, guidance, or resources to the State Board of Elections to support the development and implementation of the proposed guidelines.

For these reasons, DRM requests a favorable report on SB 73.

Contact: Braden Stinar, Bradens@disabilityrightsmd.org or 443-692-2485