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From: Ronza Othman, President
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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 with amendment to SB0948 – Internet Ballot Limitations. This bill imposes limitations on the frequency of a voter’s ability to use the internet-delivered ballot and ends the permanent internet-delivered ballot list. As it stands, this proposed legislation directly violates the Appellate Court Decision in National Federation of the Blind v. Lamone, which originally established electronic ballot delivery as a right for voters with disabilities under the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Help America Vote Act. To that end, we strongly recommend that this bill be amended.

The blind, and others with print disabilities, are able to read and independently mark our ballots when they are delivered to us via the state’s electronic delivery process. We then use our assistive technology, such as text to speech software, to read and mark the ballot. We have a right to vote this way per the NFB v. Lamone Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals decision, and limiting our ability to do so to one election would violate our civil rights. In addition, those of us who need to vote in this method are not going to change our voting method, and requiring us to elect this method of voting for every single election will add an unnecessary burden, particularly since the process of requesting to be placed on the permanent absentee list is hard enough as it is given our print disabilities.

We are therefore requesting an amendment that exempts voters who are blind and otherwise print disabled from being subjected to the provisions of this bill in the same way that military and overseas voters have been exempted.

On page five of this bill, it further expands on this by saying it “shall require the voter to choose a different method for receiving an absentee ballot for the next election cycle.” In effect, this bill relinquishes the ability for people with print disabilities to make a permanent request to receive the ballot over the internet. This is another example of voter suppression.

Voters with disabilities deserve the same right as the non-disabled population to cast their ballot privately and secretly. By limiting the only method of receiving and reading the information independently for absentee voters with disabilities, you are telling disabled people that their vote doesn't matter.

For those reasons, we ask for a favorable report conditional on amendment on SB0948. For questions, please contact me at President@nfbmd.org or at 443-426-4110.

National Federation of the Blind of Maryland

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