



# Maryland Association of Election Officials

## Supporting the Local Election Boards of the State of Maryland

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February 18, 2026

Delegate Melissa Wells, Chair  
Maryland House Government, Labor, and Elections Committee  
145 Lowe House Office Building  
Annapolis, MD 21401-1991

### **HB 641 - Information**

Chair Wells, Vice Chair Kerr, and Committee Members,

The Maryland Association of Election Officials (MAEO) is the professional membership organization representing local election officials and Election Boards across all 24 jurisdictions in Maryland. Our members are committed to ensuring the smooth and effective administration of elections and are deeply dedicated to making Maryland elections accessible, secure, and fair.

### **Pilot Program Structure & Electioneering Zones**

MAEO recognizes the substantive improvements in the 2026 version of this bill, which more effectively address the logistical and fiscal constraints faced by local boards of elections (LBEs). Scaling the bill back to be a pilot program for three representative counties would reduce the fiscal impact on the state while enabling election officials to evaluate implementation challenges, assess voter accessibility, and determine the necessary resources for a potential statewide expansion. A phased approach would also provide lawmakers with data on costs, equipment needs, and best practices before making a broader commitment. Additionally, MAEO appreciates the inclusion of no-electioneering zones in HB 641, as they help protect voters from undue influence while participating in curbside voting. Ensuring a clear, intimidation-free environment is essential to maintaining voter confidence and the integrity of the election process.

### **Technical Alignment & Procurement Timing**

While MAEO appreciates the intent of a pilot program, we must highlight a critical timing misalignment regarding the January 1, 2027, effective date. The bill mandates that designated LBEs provide curbside voters a choice between a paper ballot and a ballot marking device (BMD). However, Maryland's current statewide equipment was not engineered for outdoor, mobile use. Because this mandate takes effect before the next anticipated major procurement cycle, LBEs will be forced to deploy existing, sensitive electronic equipment in uncontrolled outdoor environments. This risks equipment failure and potential damage to state assets, as current hardware lacks the weather-resistance and battery longevity required for the 'continuous operation' implied by the pilot.

Instead, running this pilot after a future procurement process would hopefully ensure the acquisition of mobile, weather-resistant ballot marking devices and pollbooks. The pilot program would allow us to perform rigorous testing with this equipment to ensure compliance with state and federal election security standards.

### **Security & Chain-of-Custody Mandates**

HB 641 requires the State Board to certify that the pilot program "protects the security of the voting process" and "the secrecy of the ballot." From an operational perspective, meeting this legal standard is complicated by the requirement to transport "loose" paper and BMD-printed ballots from a vehicle back to the indoor scanning

unit. Moving un-scanned ballots outside the established secure perimeter of the polling room creates a chain-of-custody vulnerability. Maintaining the level of ballot secrecy and security required by this bill, and expected by Maryland voters, presents a significant administrative challenge and **may negatively impact public perception** regarding the security of the vote.

### **Operational Liability & Environmental Limits**

Beyond voter comfort, weather variability presents a technical liability. Maryland's current scanning units and pollbooks are precision instruments with documented manufacturer limits for operating temperatures and moisture exposure. Without the procurement of specialized 'all-weather' ruggedized enclosures or mobile cooling/heating solutions, LBEs risk catastrophic hardware failure and the voiding of equipment warranties if these units are deployed in the high-humidity or extreme-temperature environments typical of Maryland primary and general election cycles.

In conclusion, while we support efforts to enhance voter accessibility, it is imperative that we address our technical limitations and proceed with caution to safeguard the integrity of our electoral process. Thank you for considering our informational only testimony on this important matter. If you have any questions please feel free to reach out.