

February 18, 2026

Testimony on HB 871
Election Law – Enhanced Automatic Voter Registration System
Government, Labor, and Elections Committee

Position: Favorable

Common Cause Maryland is in support of HB 871, which would upgrade our state’s voter registration system and help more eligible voters engage with our political system.

Marylanders already submit applications and supporting documents to an agency such as the MVA when they apply for a driver’s license. An upgraded “back-end” AVR system would identify when these materials clearly demonstrate that the customer is eligible to register to voter and/or update their current voter registration. The customer’s information is then automatically sent to election officials who follow up with a mailed notice about voter registration (including an option to decline to register altogether).

This new system of automatic voter registration will bring new voters from diverse communities into the political process - current MVA data indicates 30-40% of registered MD voters are not updating their voter registration address with the MVA, and that less than half of unregistered MVA customers register to vote at the MVA.

When other states (including Colorado, Oregon, Arkansas, Nevada, Massachusetts, and Delaware) upgraded to a back-end automatic voter registration system, they doubled the rate of new registrations at their MVA, and more than doubled the rate of registration for the youngest voters. We know that people are far more likely to develop lifelong voting habits when they register early, and that those who don’t engage with the political process early are more likely to remain nonvoters throughout their lives. Adopting the system proposed by HB 871 will help to boost youth voter engagement, which is consistently low both in Maryland and nationally.

Voting is the most essential form of political expression, and the right to do so is fundamental to maintaining an open democracy. HB 871 represents a small step forward in the fight to make voting easily accessible for all eligible Marylanders.

For these reasons, we request a favorable report.