



NATIONAL FEDERATION
OF THE BLIND
MARYLAND

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From: Ronza Othman, President
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To: House Government, Labor, and Elections Committee

The members of the National Federation of the Blind of Maryland urge the House Government, Labor, and Elections Committee to give an unfavorable report to HB0830. This bill would prohibit ballots from being counted unless there is a signature on both the ballot and envelope, and that the signature has been verified. Such action would discriminate against voters with disabilities and likely violates various state and federal laws should it be enacted. It would undoubtedly be the cause of litigation from disability groups including the National Federation of the Blind.

The bill as written presents a significant barrier to voting for blind and low-vision voters. We may not know where – or even that – we are supposed to sign the ballot and envelope due to our disabilities. Forcing us to comply with such a requirement to have our votes counted subjects us to additional time, effort, and cost to have to have someone help us with this additional requirement – essentially a poll tax. Moreover, many of us do not have someone available to assist us, and if we do, we don't necessarily want them to know how we voted. We would be required to give up our privacy and independence – something very limited as it is with the way Maryland operates its absentee voting process.

Moreover, voters with print disabilities often do not have a consistent signature. For example, someone might have a signature that is clearer one day than a different day. Someone with limitations with hand dexterity, for example, might have a shakier signature than other days. Some may only use an X or other marking, which may be different day to day.

For these reasons, we ask for an unfavorable report on HB0830. For questions, please contact me at President@nfbmd.org or at 443-426-4110.