



The Honorable Members of the House Government, Labor, and Elections Committee
Maryland General Assembly
Annapolis, Maryland

In the House - Hearing 2/11 at 2:00 p.m.

House Bill 454 – SAVE Our Elections Act of 2026 – UNFAVORABLE

Honorable Chair Person and Committee Members,

Written by Mat Rice on behalf of People on The Go Maryland a statewide self-advocacy and systems-advocacy organization. We are run by and for people with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities.

POG is writing to respectfully request an unfavorable report on House Bill 454, the SAVE Our Elections Act of 2026. This bill would harm many eligible Maryland voters. It would make voting harder for people with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities, people of color, and other marginalized communities.

What House Bill 454 Does

House Bill 454 requires Maryland to use a federal computer system called SAVE. SAVE stands for Systematic Alien Verification of Entitlement. The bill would use SAVE to check if people are U.S. citizens before they can register to vote.

If the SAVE system says someone is not a citizen, that person would be removed from the voter list. They would have to prove they are a citizen to register or stay registered. If they cannot prove it quickly enough, they lose their right to vote.

Why This Bill Harms People with Intellectual and/or Developmental Disabilities

Many people with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities do not have easy access to documents that prove citizenship. These documents include passports, birth certificates, and naturalization papers.

Getting these documents is hard. It costs money. It takes time. It requires filling out complicated forms and dealing with government offices. For many people with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities, these tasks are very difficult or impossible without help.

Some people with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities have guardians. Guardianship can make it even harder to get documents or prove citizenship. Some people were born at home or in hospitals that did not keep good records. Some people live in group homes or facilities where they may not have easy access to their papers.

People with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities are less likely to have driver's licenses or other common forms of identification. This makes proving citizenship even harder.

If the SAVE system makes a mistake and says someone is not a citizen, that person must fix the error. But navigating government systems and correcting mistakes is extremely difficult for many people with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities. They could lose their right to vote even though they are eligible citizens.

Why This Bill Harms People of Color

Research shows that people of color are more likely to lack citizenship documents. About 11% of Americans of color do not have citizenship documents readily available. For white Americans, that number is only 8%.

There are historical reasons for this. During the Jim Crow era, many Black Americans were denied birth certificates. This created problems that continue today. Black and Hispanic Americans are much less likely to have driver's licenses than white Americans.

The SAVE system has shown racial bias in practice. When states have used similar systems, Black, Latino, and Asian voters have been flagged at much higher rates. Many of these people were actually eligible citizens. But they had to fight to prove it.

Getting documents like birth certificates costs money – often \$50 or more. For low-income families, many of whom are people of color, this is a real burden. Travel to government offices, time off work, and other costs make it even harder.

The SAVE Program Makes Serious Mistakes

The SAVE program is not reliable. It was not designed to verify citizenship for voting. It has serious problems:

- The SAVE database is incomplete. It does not have records for all U.S. citizens. Most people born in

the United States are not in the system.

- The data is often outdated. The Social Security Administration did not keep good citizenship records before 1978. Many naturalized citizens never updated their records.
- The system makes mistakes. It gives false reports that eligible citizens are not citizens. Studies show that when states use SAVE to check voter rolls, many citizens are wrongly flagged.
- When SAVE makes a mistake, the voter must fix it. The burden falls on the voter to prove they are a citizen. For 21 million Americans who lack easy access to citizenship documents, this is an impossible task.

Using a flawed system to decide who can vote will remove eligible voters from the rolls. This is voter suppression.

The Problem Is Extremely Rare

This bill is meant to stop non-citizens from voting. But non-citizen voting is extremely rare. Studies show it almost never happens. It is already illegal. There are already systems to prevent it.

For example, a review in Michigan found only 15 cases of apparent non-citizen voting out of more than 5.7 million ballots cast. Most of those cases were accidents, not fraud.

This bill would create huge barriers for thousands of eligible voters to solve a problem that barely exists. That is not fair or reasonable.

Other Groups This Bill Would Harm

House Bill 454 would also hurt:

- Naturalized citizens, who are more likely to be flagged by the SAVE system
- Women who have changed their names after marriage
- Elderly voters who may have lost documents over the years
- Low-income Marylanders who cannot afford to get documents
- Indigenous people who may not have birth certificates
- Young people voting for the first time
- Anyone who has moved recently or experienced a natural disaster

All of these people are eligible to vote. But this bill would make it much harder for them.

Conclusion

Voting is a fundamental right. It is the foundation of our democracy. Every eligible citizen should be able to register and vote without unnecessary barriers.

House Bill 454 would create serious barriers. It would use an unreliable computer system to decide who can vote. It would remove eligible voters from the rolls. It would force vulnerable Marylanders to prove their citizenship or lose their right to vote.

The people we represent, people with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities would be especially harmed. So would people of color and other marginalized communities.

For these reasons, People On The Go Maryland respectfully requests that this committee give House Bill 454 an unfavorable report.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

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