



TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE GOVERNMENT, LABOR, ELECTIONS COMMITTEE

HB 964 Secure the Vote Act 2026

Position – Opposed

BY: Linda T. Kohn, President

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The League of Women Voters of Maryland has a long history of supporting elections that are free, fair, and allow as many eligible voters as possible to access the ballot box. The League is also committed to elections that are easy to understand for voters and that maximize each voter's power. The League can hold these beliefs because we have evidence that proves our elections are safe, secure, and maintain the highest integrity.

HB 964 is rooted in the pretense that misinformation should drive legislation. The League disagrees. While this bill aims to call into question everything known about elections, it fails to consider actual information backed by leading experts.

This bill would like to mandate an audit of the Maryland voter roll. On the surface, this would seem like a good measure. However, voter roll audits are already conducted routinely by the Maryland State Board of Elections. This internal audit is in addition to ongoing updates from several Maryland agencies or the interstate agreement, ERIC. There is nothing in any of the reporting from SBE or other agencies to suggest that additional audits are necessary.

Furthermore, HB 964 seeks to severely limit the number of ways Marylanders can cast their mail-in ballots. It proposes moving to a system that would require the voter to attest that they “need” a reason for their vote to be allowed. This would severely undercut Maryland's voter turnout. In a study by the MIT Election Lab, it is noted that voting by mail modestly increases voter turnout in midterm and presidential elections; it does increase voter turnout in primary and local elections.¹ It is well known that increasing voter turnout in Maryland's primary elections is crucial.

The security of mail-in voting has also been called into question. Fueled by misinformation and partisan rumors, there has yet to be any credible source to suggest that voting by mail is anything less than safe and secure. First extended to Union soldiers during the Civil War, vote-by-mail has become increasingly popular, especially since the 1980s. As of now, 35 states plus the District of Columbia allow for no-excuse

¹ <https://electionlab.mit.edu/research/voting-mail-and-absentee-votin,,g>



mail-in voting. There has been nothing that would warrant doing away with vote-by-mail due to safety concerns or tampering. In fact, in 2020, the Department of Homeland Security addressed growing concerns with findings that suggested, “Russia is likely to continue amplifying criticisms of vote-by-mail and shifting voting processes amidst the COVID-19 pandemic to undermine public trust in the electoral process.”²

Maryland implements several key safeguards to ensure that all ballots are securely handled. These practices include, but are not limited to: voter ballot tracking, canvassing observation, surveillance cameras at drop boxes, and chain of custody procedures. In short, it would be very difficult to tamper with mail-in balloting. While we acknowledge that difficult does not mean impossible, so far, the evidence does not support a need to change as HB 964 suggests.

One of the main focuses of this bill is to institute voter identification at the polls. The League has spent many legislative sessions in Annapolis explaining why voter ID is not only unnecessary in Maryland, but also restrictive to voters. Once again, HB 964 aims to validate election claims that lack any basis in reality. What is true is that millions of Americans lack the adequate identification needed to meet the standards of this bill. They would be forced to navigate the tasks to acquire one, and would also pay hundreds of dollars for it. This can include money for a birth certificate, an updated passport, and an updated driver’s license. This could be equated to a modern-day poll tax. Voter ID laws also work to keep minority communities out. According to the ACLU, 13% of Black Americans do not have government-issued ID, while 5% of whites do not.

HB 964 aims to perpetuate misinformation and cause confusion among voters, rather than finding pathways for more Marylanders to vote. It serves to further rumors that Maryland elections are anything but safe and secure.

For these reasons, the League of Women Voters of Maryland would request an unfavorable report.

²<https://electioninnovation.org/update/is-voting-by-mail-secure-and-how-can-i-know-my-mail-in-vote-is-counted/>