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Legislative District 13
Howard County

Government, Labor, and
Elections Committee

Subcommittees

Election Law

Labor

Oversight Committee on Personnel



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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

February 25, 2026

To: The Honorable Melissa Wells
Chair, Government, Labor, and Elections Committee

From: Delegate Jen Terrasa
District 13, Howard County

Re: Sponsor Testimony in Support of HB 1027 Election Law - Telephone
Voting System - Requirements

Dear Chair Wells, Vice Chair Kerr, and Members of the Government, Labor, and Elections Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to present HB 1027, which would require the State Board of Elections (SBE) to establish an accessible telephone voting process for voters with disabilities. This is a cross-file of SB 901 sponsored by Senator Ben Brooks.

Currently, the mail-in voting process in Maryland is paper-based and does not allow blind voters and those with other print disabilities to vote privately and independently. The process can feel discriminatory and has the impact of disenfranchising voters.

Maryland's current mail-in voting system enables voters to request that a ballot be sent to them electronically, and they can use their technology to vote the ballot, but the voter has to print, sign, and return the ballot in the mail or to a drop box. Blind and low-vision voters and those with print disabilities must get assistance printing, signing and certifying, and mailing in or dropping off their ballots. As a result, the voter's privacy and independence are compromised, as others see the voter's choices and can even alter the voter's selections without their knowledge.

This can be problematic for voters who don't have someone trusted available to assist them. Others don't want their family members and friends to know how they are voting. Some have shared that the people helping them have tried to persuade them to vote a certain way or changed their vote after seeing who they've selected. These instances demonstrate that current voting methods can violate the autonomy of voters with disabilities and even undermine the democratic process.

HB 1027 creates a novel and secure method of ensuring that blind and otherwise print disabled voters can vote privately and independently, and ballot return would not use the internet. The method proposed in this legislation would rely on automated phone systems to capture the voter's choices. Here's how it would work:

- A blind or otherwise print disabled voter would request to vote absentee using the telephone voting system, in the same way that such a voter requests to use the electronically delivered ballot. In that request, they would certify that they are a person who is blind or otherwise print disabled.
- SBE would, after verifying their eligibility to vote, send the voter credentials to access the telephone voting system and ensure that those credentials are associated with the specific ballot assigned to that voter's area.
- The voter would call a toll free number, established by SBE operating an automated system, and enter their access credentials using a touchtone phone, which would load their specific ballot into the automated touch-tone phone system.
- The automated system would read each candidate in each contest and the voter would make their choices using their touchtone telephone. The system would review each selection so the voter can confirm the selections are accurate.
- The system would require the voter to certify the ballot in a way acceptable to SBE.
- Once the voter submits the ballot through the automated phone system, the ballot is stored in a secure system that is not connected to the internet.
- SBE would print the ballot, ensuring auditability and a paper record.
- SBE would duplicate the ballot to a scannable ballot, just like it does for every other absentee ballot that it receives, and place it into the canvas process.

This method is modeled after a system that both Australia and New Zealand use for voters who are blind, but is adapted to account for Maryland elections, which have a greater variety of contests and candidates. HB 1027 would result in a secure method of voting that maintains the integrity of elections.

The only difference between telephone voting and the current absentee/mail-in voting process is that SBE establishes a reasonable accommodation for a subset of absentee voters: an automated telephonic voting method that issues credentials for that system and prints the voted ballots. All other aspects of this method are the same as how Maryland currently processes absentee ballots. On the other hand, this new method allows voters to vote privately and independently without having to use methods that are inconsistent with their disabilities, like paper.

Note there will be a number of sponsor amendments offered that will tighten up some of the language in HB 1027 and ensure feasibility of this voting method.

Voting is a fundamental right, and equal access to voting methods is essential to maintaining a fair and inclusive democracy. However, our current procedures for voting

unfairly disadvantage those who are blind, low vision, print disabled, have hand dexterity limitations, or cannot return a ballot privately and independently.

We can't keep forcing these voters to give up privacy and independence while we wait for technology and security to catch up. Telephone voting is a common-sense, accessible, secure, low-tech way to ensure that voters with certain disabilities are able to vote privately and independently.

For those reasons, I respectfully urge a favorable report on HB 1027.