



Empowering People to Lead Systemic Change

The Protection and Advocacy System for the State of Maryland

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HOUSE GOVERNMENT LABOR AND ELECTIONS COMMITTEE
**House Bill 1027: Election Law- Telephone Voting System-
Requirements**
February 25, 2026
Position: Support (With Sponsor Amendments)

Disability Rights Maryland (DRM) is the State's Protection and Advocacy agency, federally mandated to advance and protect the civil rights of people with disabilities. As part of that mandate, DRM works to ensure that Marylanders with disabilities can fully and equally participate in the electoral process. DRM respectfully submits this testimony in support of House Bill 1027, as strengthened by the sponsor amendments.

Federal law, including the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Help America Vote Act (HAVA), requires that voters with disabilities have an equal opportunity to participate in the voting process, including the opportunity to vote privately and independently. Despite these protections, significant barriers persist. Many voting methods continue to rely on printed materials or in-person assistance, limiting meaningful access and undermining ballot secrecy for some voters with disabilities.

Many voters with print disabilities—including individuals who are blind or who have low vision—are unable to independently read or mark a standard paper ballot. As a result, these voters must rely on assistance from poll workers, family members, or aides to complete their ballot. This reliance can compromise ballot secrecy and undermines the fundamental right to vote privately and independently.

House Bill 1027 establishes a telephonic absentee voting system for voters who have print disabilities. This system would allow eligible voters to communicate and confirm their ballot selections in a private and secure manner.

Telephonic voting has the potential to meaningfully address the barriers previously mentioned. When implemented with strong security and accessibility safeguards, telephonic voting can provide voters with disabilities the opportunity to cast their ballots independently, privately, and securely. This bill does not propose a method that will replace existing voting options; rather, it expands access to work to ensure that no voter is excluded by a system that does not meet their needs.

DRM supports House Bill 1027 with the sponsor amendments which are also supported by the National Federation of the Blind of Maryland. These

amendments strengthen the bill by reinforcing implementation timelines, establishing security and testing safeguards, and grounding the certification process in the State's disability access obligations while preserving the bill's core accessibility purpose.

Specifically, the sponsor amendments:

- Require that the telephone voting system be fully operational and available for use by eligible voters no later than the 2030 primary election:
- Direct the State Board of Elections to coordinate with the Department of Information Technology to assess the feasibility of developing the system internally, evaluate cost, security, timeline, and procurement considerations, and determine whether development is a viable compared to acquisition from a third-party vendor.
- Clarify that the system must protect the rights of voters and candidates in a manner consistent with federal and state disability rights laws, including the Americans with Disabilities Act.
- Require independent security and performance testing consistent with applicable federal or state standards for voting systems, or if no such standards exist for telephone voting systems, standards developed in consultations with the Department of Information Technology.
- Replace the general "public interest" certification standard with a requirement that certification be consistent with the State's obligations to provide accessible voting under federal and state law.
- Provide that the State Board of Elections may not decline to certify a telephone voting system solely because it is available to voters with a print disability as a reasonable accommodation.

Although House Bill 1027 represents an important step toward expanding voting access in Maryland, it must not be viewed as a substitute for accessible polling places that allow all voters to cast a ballot privately and independently. Maryland should continue to implement accessibility improvements across all voting methods to accommodate the needs of individuals with diverse disabilities.

Ensuring that every Marylander can vote securely, privately, and independently should remain a central priority in election policy. Access to the ballot is a bipartisan principle that strengthens our democracy and affirms the fundamental right to participate in civic life.

For these reasons, DRM requests a favorable report on House Bill 1027 with the sponsor amendments.

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