



## TESTIMONY

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### **House Bill 499**

Election Law – Registered Voter List and Petitions  
(Ballot Petition Modernization Act)  
Government, Labor, and Elections Committee

### **POSITION: FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENT**

Hearing Date: February-11-2026

Hon. Chairperson and Distinguished Members of the Committee:

People on the Go Maryland respectfully submits this testimony regarding House Bill 499, sponsored by Delegate Ruth and assigned to the Government, Labor, and Elections Committee. Our mission is to support self advocacy and civil rights throughout the state.

We support the intent of House Bill 499 to modernize the ballot petition process and make it easier for Maryland voters to participate in our democracy through electronic signatures. This modernization is an important step forward for voter engagement and accessibility.

### **Concerns About Electronic Signing Barriers**

While we strongly support the bill's goals, we have concerns about how the electronic signature requirements could create unintended barriers for people with physical disabilities and intellectual or developmental disabilities.

Many people with disabilities have functional signatures or use name stamps that work well on paper. However, these same individuals may have significant difficulty using electronic signature pads and electronic pens due to:

- Motor control limitations that make electronic devices hard to use
- Physical disabilities that affect hand coordination
- Difficulty understanding or navigating electronic signing technology
- Inability to hold or manipulate electronic styluses

The current language in Section 6-203(F)(2) requires that electronic signatures be "ELECTRONICALLY SIGNED, TYPED, OR AFFIXED." While typing is mentioned, the emphasis on "electronically signed" could be interpreted to require electronic signature pads, which would exclude many people with disabilities from participating in the petition process.

Additionally, while Section 6-103(a)(2)(IV) directs the State Board to create accessibility regulations, the statute itself does not provide clear guidance on accessible signing methods. This could leave people with disabilities without adequate protections.

### **Proposed Amendment**

We respectfully request that the committee amend House Bill 499 to ensure that people with disabilities can participate fully in the electronic petition process. Specifically, we propose adding the following language to Section 6-203(F):

(4) TO ENSURE ACCESSIBILITY FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES:

(I) AN INDIVIDUAL WITH A DISABILITY MAY PROVIDE AN ELECTRONIC SIGNATURE THROUGH ANY OF THE FOLLOWING METHODS:

1. TYPING THE INDIVIDUAL'S NAME;
2. HAVING ANOTHER PERSON ASSIST IN AFFIXING THE INDIVIDUAL'S SIGNATURE ELECTRONICALLY AT THE DIRECTION OF THE INDIVIDUAL;
3. USING A SCANNED OR PHOTOGRAPHED IMAGE OF THE INDIVIDUAL'S HANDWRITTEN SIGNATURE OR NAME STAMP;
4. USING ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY; OR
5. ANY OTHER METHOD THAT ALLOWS THE INDIVIDUAL TO AFFIX THE INDIVIDUAL'S SIGNATURE IN AN ACCESSIBLE MANNER.

(II) A CIRCULATOR SHALL ACCEPT ANY METHOD OF ELECTRONIC SIGNATURE LISTED IN SUBPARAGRAPH (I) OF THIS PARAGRAPH IF THE INDIVIDUAL REPRESENTS THAT THE INDIVIDUAL HAS A DISABILITY THAT MAKES OTHER METHODS INACCESSIBLE.

### **What This Amendment Does (In Plain Language)**

This change makes sure people with disabilities can sign petitions in ways that work for them.

Right now, the bill talks about electronic signatures. Some people think this means you need to use a special pen and pad to sign on a screen. Many people with disabilities cannot use these tools because of their disability.

Our amendment says people with disabilities can sign in these ways:

1. Type their name on a computer or phone
2. Have someone help them sign if they need help
3. Take a picture of their signature or name stamp and use that
4. Use special tools that help them
5. Use any way that works for them

The person collecting signatures must let people sign in the way that works best for them. This makes sure everyone can participate.

### **Why This Amendment Is Important**

This amendment ensures that the modernization of the petition process includes everyone, not just people who can use electronic signature pads. It protects the civil rights of people with disabilities to participate fully in Maryland's democratic process.

The amendment provides clear statutory guidance rather than leaving accessibility entirely to regulatory discretion. This gives people with disabilities concrete protections they can rely on.

Most importantly, this amendment reflects the reality that people with disabilities have diverse needs and abilities. By allowing multiple methods of signing, the amendment ensures that no one is left out simply because they cannot use a particular technology.

**Conclusion**

People on the Go Maryland request the committee to give House Bill 499 a favorable report with the amendment described above. This amendment will ensure that the bill's important goal of modernizing the petition process includes all Marylanders, including those with disabilities.

Thank you for your time and consideration of our testimony. We appreciate the committee's attention to the needs of people with disabilities in Maryland.

Respectfully submitted,  
**People on the Go Maryland**

Executive Director: Mat Rice  
PHONE : 4109255706  
EMAIL: [mat@pogmd.org](mailto:mat@pogmd.org)