

**Written Testimony**

**HB 37: Election Law - References to Absentee Voting in Communications - Mail-In Voting**

Ways & Means Committee

January 16, 2020

Position: FAVORABLE

Richard Bruno, MD MPH

3822 Beech Ave

Baltimore, MD 21211

Dear members of the Ways & Means Committee,

I'm Richard Bruno, a primary care physician and public health practitioner in Baltimore. In my clinic in Baltimore, I care for thousands of uninsured people and Medicaid and Medicare populations where the downstream effects of voter disenfranchisement have led to severe and fatal health outcomes. From my perspective, *voter empowerment is a public health issue*.

With the very real threat of voter suppression in our country and countries around the world, Maryland can combat these threats to our democracy by removing barriers to voting. What HB 37 does is change the antiquated term "Absentee ballot" to "Mail-in ballot," since you don't have to be absent to use it.

Why should someone have to take off half a day of work to stand in line for hours, or be told on the day of voting that their voter registration is invalid or inactive or they're in the wrong polling place? A mail-in ballot can be used from the convenience of one's home—either printed from their computer or requested to be mailed to them—and signed and mailed back or dropped at a library.

Currently, only a very small fraction of votes cast in Maryland are by "Absentee ballots," with Montgomery County the highest utilized jurisdiction at 7.8% of total votes cast in the 2016 presidential general election. Overall voter turnout in Baltimore City's 41st legislative district, where I live, was a dismal 31% in the 2018 gubernatorial primary election (in which I was a candidate for delegate).

I lived in Oregon for medical school, where voting is done entirely by mail (just like Washington and Colorado) and 80% of Oregonian voters voted by mail in the 2000 presidential general election. We received a packet in the mail which described all of the candidates and referenda, which we reviewed, voted on, and mailed back or dropped at the library (as of 2019, ballots did not need a stamp). It was a secure, cheap, convenient, efficient, and informed way to cast my vote.

I urge members of the Ways & Means Committee to give this bill favorable review, and empower Marylanders to utilize a form of voting they may not have known they could use, due to the misnamed "Absentee ballot."