



TESTIMONY TO THE SENATE EDUCATION, HEALTH, AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

SB 408 Department of Legislative Services – Voting by Mail – Study

POSITION: Support

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The League of Women Voters believes voting is a fundamental citizen right that must be guaranteed. We also support an election system that is equitable and accessible.

In the year 2000, Oregon became the first state to adopt a full vote by mail program. Since then, Washington and Colorado have also adopted Vote by Mail. Twenty-two other states use vote by mail for special elections or in certain jurisdictions. According to the website of the Secretary of State of Oregon, “Oregon has the most convenient voting system in the country. Since adopting vote-by-mail, Oregon consistently ranks as a national leader in voter turnout.” Oregon voters also receive an official ballot to complete and insert into a security envelope that is placed in the ballot return envelope and signed by the voter. The ballot return envelope can be stamped and mailed or dropped off at any official drop box in Oregon. We note that the Maryland General Assembly is currently considering legislation to authorize pre-payment of return envelopes for absentee ballots, which would overcome one potential difficulty for voters in returning their ballots.

Voting by mail has the potential to make elections more accessible to more voters, but before Maryland decides to go this route, it should be carefully studied. This bill would require a study to make recommendations regarding the administrative, technological, legal, security, and fiscal requirements to implement voting by mail and the return of mail-in ballots by alternate methods.

We also urge that the study consider whether methods of implementing mail-in voting could reduce disparities in turnout, particularly among minority and low-income voters. Although the bill currently requires that the report be provided to the General Assembly before the end of 2020, the presidential election may limit the amount of assistance that the Board of Elections can provide. Allowing additional time could result in a more comprehensive study.

We urge a favorable report on SB 408.