

February 14, 2020

Testimony of Amber F. McReynolds and National Vote at Home Institute in Support of SB 408 Department of Legislative Services - Voting by Mail - Study:

Regarding a Study of Vote by Mail Methods:

1. I am providing this testimony both in my personal capacity - as an expert in the field of election administration - and currently as CEO for the National Vote At Home Institute, a nonprofit nonpartisan organization which is focused on improving the voting experience for voters across the country and implementing convenient voting options to include effective ballot delivery systems (commonly known as ballots by mail) along with in-person voting options.
2. I was qualified as an expert witness in the field of election administration, in the Civil Action No. 17-02016 (RC), U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia (2017) and Gessler v. Johnson, 2011CV6588, Denver District Court (2013). I also provided amicus curiae testimony in the recent Georgia case 1:18 – cv – 04776-LMM Martin, Bowers et al v. Kemp.
3. Until August 15, 2018, I was the Elections Director for the City and County of Denver, Colorado. I administered elections in Denver for 13 years and have worked in public policy and administration for over 16 years. I served as the Director of Elections for the past 7 years, Deputy Director of Elections from 2008 to 2011, and Operations Manager/Coordinator from 2005-2008. Denver has approximately 500,000 registered voters and conducts 2-4 elections each year. The elections include municipal general and municipal run-off, school board, special district, primary, general, presidential. The State of Colorado conducts all federal and state elections by mail ballot.
4. My relevant educational and professional background is as follows:
 - a. Masters of Science – Comparative Politics, London School of Economics & Political Science, 2002
 - b. Bachelor of Arts – Political Science and Speech Communications, University of Illinois, 2001

Professional Certifications:

- a. Certified Elections/Registration Administrator (CERA), Election Center (2010 – Present)
 - b. Certified Colorado Election Official (2007 – Present)
5. In my role as the Director of Elections in Denver, I focused on continual process improvement which includes implementing innovative solutions to improve the voter's experience. During my tenure, the Denver Elections Division earned national awards from the Election Center and the National Association of Counties for Ballot TRACE (a first-in-the-nation ballot tracking, reporting, and communication engine), iAPP (iPad Accessibility Pilot Project), and eSign (a first-in-the-nation Digital Petition and Voter Registration Drive Application). Denver has also been recognized by the International Centre for Parliamentary Studies and received International Electoral Awards for Ballot TRACE and eSign. In addition, the Denver Elections Division has released other innovative solutions including the Denver Votes mobile application, enhanced contextual and behavioral marketing strategies to encourage civic engagement, interactive customer service platforms and implemented a new voting system in 2015.

Rationale for supporting SB 408

SB 408 has my full support, and I recommend it receive yours because I believe strongly in a data-driven and customer service-oriented model of government services. This bill requires a study of vote by mail systems and a report of recommendations specific to the state of Maryland.

We strongly support this bill on the basis that we have already seen enormous growth in vote by mail (VBM) processes nationwide and corresponding growth in participation as well as decreases in cost.

States such as Colorado, Utah, Washington, Oregon and Hawaii are using full VBM systems, with California in the process of transition to full VBM currently. Furthermore, Nevada, Arizona, Montana, New Jersey and the District of Columbia are a step below, with permanent no excuse absentee options. In our opinion, it is not coincidental that many of these states have some of the highest participation rates and continue to grow.

VOTE HOME

But all states are different and while we strongly advocate for full VBM systems, we do acknowledge that every state is different and that what works in one state might not work in another.

We know that mail ballots, coupled with voter service centers, a highly secure and modern registration system including e-pollbooks, and strong voter education efforts can yield major results. We also know that well intentioned reforms mean little when they are not created with and implemented by local elections experts. And so, we applaud the forward thinking to study the effects of VBM in Maryland and how best to approach implementation while increasing convenience, reliability, public awareness, accessibility and security.

We at NVAHI were instrumental in authoring a similar study done by the State of Connecticut and released in 2019 and have been very pleased to see their legislature taking the recommendations seriously and working methodically to pass reforms that work for their state and their voters. You can see that report at: www.voteathome.org/EO-64

Therefore, we urge your support for SB 408 and would be pleased to offer any support that we can in your continued efforts to increase civic participation in Maryland.