



Barbara Noveau, Executive Director, DoTheMostGood—Montgomery County

HEARING DATE: February 20, 2020

COMMITTEE: Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

TESTIMONY ON: SB408—Department of Legislative Services—Voting by Mail-Study

POSITION: Favorable

BILL CONTACT: Senator Benjamin F. Kramer

To: The Honorable Paul G. Pinsky, Chair, Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee, and Committee Members

DoTheMostGood—Montgomery County (DTMG) is a progressive grass-roots organization with more than 1600 members who live in a wide range of communities from Bethesda near the DC line north to Germantown and beyond, and from Potomac east to Silver Spring and Olney. One of the major priorities of our organization is to enlarge the number of registered voters and to support the enactment of legislation that facilitates voting. A vibrant democracy is one that allows an educated citizenry to shape laws and policies that affect them through the fair election of officials, encourages adult citizens to vote, and makes it easy for those citizens to register and vote.

SB408 would require the Department of Legislative Services to study and make recommendations by December 1, 2020 regarding the administrative, technological, legal, security, and fiscal requirements to implement voting by mail. The Department would evaluate alternative approaches. DTMG enthusiastically supports enactment of this bill because voting by mail makes it easier for citizens to cast ballots; increases voter turnout; makes elections more secure; and reduces governmental costs in conducting elections, thereby saving the taxpayers money.

Three states have adopted voting by mail—Colorado, Oregon, and Washington. Their approaches differ. Voting by mail in Oregon is the exclusive means of casting votes; there are no polling stations. Colorado and Washington mail ballots to all registered voters, but there are a limited number of polling stations for those who wish to vote in person. In those states, ballots are mailed to residents two-three weeks in advance of the election, giving voters time to learn about the candidates and any referenda on the ballot.

Voting by mail makes voting accessible for more Americans. Accessing traditional polling places isn't always possible, because of work, disability, a lack of transportation, or the hectic lives we live. Many Maryland citizens are not aware that they can request an "absentee" ballot without having to justify an inability to vote in person, also suppressing turnout. To make matters worse,

these impediments to voting in person disproportionately impact communities of color, low wage hourly workers and the elderly.

Colorado, Oregon, and Washington all have higher voter turnouts than Maryland and the national average. In the November 2018 elections, the three states had voter turnouts ranging from 58-61.4% of voters; Maryland percentage was a little over 54% with the national average at approximately 50%. Locally, in November of 2019, the City of Rockville conducted its local elections exclusively by mail. The result was record participation, doubling the number from the previous local election.

Not only is voter turnout increased, but by relying on paper ballots, there are no cybersecurity issues. Moreover, there can be substantial governmental cost savings. Specifically, schools would not need to be closed, and there would be fewer, if any, voting machines to procure, maintain, and store. Counties in Colorado saw costs declines by an average of 40 percent following implementation of voting by mail.

For reasons stated above, DTMG strongly supports SB408 and urges a **FAVORABLE** report on this bill.

Respectfully submitted,

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