

Feb 24, 2020

Testimony on HB 426
Department of Legislative Services - Voting by Mail - Study
Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

Position: Favorable

Common Cause Maryland supports HB 426, which would require the Department of Legislative Services in consultation with the State Board of Elections and Maryland Association of Election Officials study and make recommendation on voting by mail.

Currently, Maryland voters have the option of voting at an early voting center prior to Election Day or by absentee. While many have taken advantage of both programs, we believe there is more the state can do to drive participation and make voting more convenient. The act of voting can be a burdensome process for many eligible voters who want to participate. Most registered voters cite conflicting schedules, inconvenient hours, and accessibility as their reason for not voting. A vote by mail system would help to address all of those issues.

Vote by mail differs from no-excuse absentee voting in that registered voters need not file a request to receive their ballots prior election day, paper ballots are distributed by mail to all registered voters. This system provides voters with more time to researching the candidates and issues and they are able to vote from the comfort of their own home, delivering their completed ballot by mail, dropping it off at a vote center, or by collection box.

Colorado, Oregon, and Washington currently conduct all of their elections by mail. According to a study on the turnout effect of vote by mail elections, Colorado increased participation in the state by about 2-5% and increased participation of those between 18-34 years old by 9%. Denver saw an increase in participation by Latinos. Outside of helping to increase turnout and create greater convenience, vote by mail would address lack election resources and poll workers.

Here in Maryland, the City of Rockville made history when using almost entirely vote by mail system in their 2019 municipal election. Ballots were mailed to more than 38,000 registered voters, who could mail them back or drop them off at a secure ballot box at City Hall or on Election Day. The first use of their vote by mail system nearly doubled voter turnout in compared to their 2015 election.

Vote by mail would help to eliminate many of the burdens that discourage voters from participating in our elections, creating greater accessibility and equity in our elections. HB 426 aim to identify a vote by mail method that would benefit all Marylanders.

We recommend a favorable report.