



## **TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE**

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

**POSITION: Support in Principle**

**BY: Lois Hybl and Richard Willson – Co-Presidents**

**Date: January 16, 2020**

The League of Women Voters believes that democratic government depends upon informed and active citizen participation and supports efforts to encourage greater voter participation. League volunteers throughout the state work not only to register voters but also to make them aware of their options for voting by absentee ballot, during early voting, and on election day.

Over the past several years, Maryland has taken several steps to increase the ease of voting. These include the amendment to the constitution to permit the use of absentee ballots not only by those absent on election day but also “by qualified voters who might otherwise choose to vote by absentee ballot.” Maryland Constitution, Article I, Section 3(a). Both on election websites and in printed voter information materials it is explained that a voter may request an absentee ballot without stating that they will be absent on election day.

As the sponsors of this bill have noted, however, voters who see the term “absentee ballot” may assume that they must be absent from their precinct in order to vote by absentee. This may result in some voters effectively losing the opportunity to vote due to a lack of awareness of the flexibility already offered by law.

We support the intent of the legislation but believe that it can be improved to ensure that the most effective language is used in future voter education materials. It is possible that “mail-in voting” may not be the clearest term for all voters. We suggest that the bill be amended to authorize the State Board of Elections to work with communications specialists to develop the language that will be most effective to inform voters that they may request an absentee ballot.

The LWVMD representing 1500+ concerned citizens throughout Maryland, supports this bill with an amendment as suggested above.