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FOR: HB 37

Delegate Anne R. Kaiser, chairperson of the House Ways and Means Committee:

Hello,

My name is Janice Ford and I have been active in voter registration drives for the past four years. I am certified by the Howard County League of Women Voters to register any and all residents who wish to vote in our county, state, and national elections. I am a strong believer in the power of the vote and believe that all Americans should be able to exercise their right to vote. With that in mind, I chose increasing voter registrations as a personal means to serve my community and my state.

I was a member of the Howard County Voter Registration Coalition several years ago, and am more recently now a member of the Red-to- Blue team with Howard County Indivisible. I have stood outside of countless grocery stores, I have manned tables at community events, I have helped register college students on their campus and I have knocked on hundreds of doors offering individuals the opportunity to register to vote and become an active member of our community. It was during these interactions with residents that I found that many people are quite confused as to the options available to them to vote in Maryland. Many individuals, especially the elderly or those without a means of transportation, say that they are not registered because they cannot easily get to the polls. It was then that I would mention the option of using an absentee ballot. Almost without exception, they would respond that "They are not absent", they just can't get to the polling places. They usually add the comment, "Aren't absentee ballots just for military personnel or college students away from home?" I would explain that they too can avail themselves of the absentee ballot option and would encourage them to fill out a request form for such a ballot.

I can't help but think that if we can change the language to a mail-in ballot, more people would realize that it is an easy, viable option for those that have difficulty getting to the polls. There would no longer be any confusion on who is able to use an absentee ballot. I believe the availability of a mail-in option will also be popular with residents who would like to research all the candidates and make their decisions at a time that suits them. Isn't that a goal of all government, to have an educated and participating electorate?

Thank you for your consideration and I hope your committee gives a favorable ruling on HB 37.

Janice Ford