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Testimony for HB 487: Election Law – Early Voting Centers – Accessibility by Public Transportation

Ways and Means Committee

Good afternoon Madam Chair, Vice Chair, and distinguished members of the committee. I am Del. Brian Crosby and it's an honor to present House Bill 487 entitled **Election Law – Early Voting Centers – Accessibility by Public Transportation**.

The purpose of this bill is to ensure that all Marylanders have the capacity and access to participate in early voting by requiring that early voting centers be placed within a quarter-mile of a fixed-route public transportation station or stop. My county contains only early voting location, despite being one of the largest in the state by area. This location, on top of being located eleven miles away from Lexington Park, the County's most populous area, is also not near a designated public transit stop or station. Instead, residents must flag down a bus while waiting alongside a major highway. This presents a serious impediment to many of my constituents attempting to perform their civic duty.

Access to in-person early voting is essential for all voters on election day. Maryland has 660,000 disabled residents, 567,000 residents living below the poverty line, and 1.2 million elderly residents, many of whom rely on public transit as their primary means of transportation. In the 2016 presidential election, 14% of eligible voters cited a conflicting schedule for their inability to cast a ballot, and an additional 3% directly attributed their inability to vote to transportation issues. This means that nearly a fifth of eligible voters may have been artificially kept out of the governing process.

We must remove barriers that our constituents face in fulfilling their most basic and important constitutional right. By requiring counties with fixed-route public transportation to place their early voting locations near a station or stop, we will help ensure that hundreds of thousands of eligible voters will encounter one less barrier in casting their ballot.

For these reasons I urge this committee to find a favorable report for HB 487.