

GET MONEY OUT

Maryland

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TESTIMONY BEFORE THE WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 859 ABSENTEE BALLOT REQUESTS, DELIVERY, AND MARKING

February 18, 2020

Get Money Out (GMOM) is an all-volunteer organization that was established just over seven years ago. We now have more than 8,400 citizen supporters. We work in Maryland toward the goals that all citizens should have equal access to the ballot and an equal say in governance.

The integrity of elections must be of paramount concern to State government. Cynicism about government and elections is already rampant for a variety of reasons. We have seen a major absentee ballot fraud in North Carolina perpetrated by low-tech means, but we also have high-tech methods of circulating false information on the Internet. Using bots, unattributed social media identities, and deepfakes, unscrupulous people can circulate false information much faster than fact-checkers can react.

Maryland has a vulnerability in allowing any voter to request and mark an absentee ballot online. Hackers who have gathered information on hundreds of millions of people by breaking into Equifax, Marriott, or any other data aggregator have all the information they need to request your absentee ballot and mark it online. If a major actor in an election were to perpetrate such large-scale fraud, they could target a group of voters in a primary or general election in order to tip the election to a favored candidate or ballot issue. It would happen fast and without warning. You could lose your vote.

Under HB 859, in order to receive an absent ballot over the Internet, a voter would have to be 1) a military service member assigned abroad or 2) a disabled or other voter who cannot vote except by Internet ballot. Restricting access to Internet ballots should greatly reduce risk of automated attacks by bad actors using stolen identities.

We well understand the Committee's general reluctance to act when a vulnerability is theoretical and has not occurred in actual practice. However, in this case, the consequences of a large-scale occurrence would be quite severe – requiring a repeat election and further eroding public confidence in our democracy. We urge you to follow the advice of election security experts and to fill this gap before a disastrous incident occurs. Please issue a favorable report on House Bill 859.