

Alex Garcia  
Former Chairman,  
Voter Protection and Engagement Committee  
Maryland Democratic Party

House Ways and Means Committee  
Attn: Dels. Washington, Cardin, Ivey, Korman, Williams (Sponsors/Co-Sponsors)  
Re: HB859

Committee Members:

I am pleased to offer this written testimony in support of HB859, which makes valuable and needed improvements to existing law which applies to voters requesting to receive ballots via the internet.

Existing law aimed to increase voters' access to their ballot and to encourage a greater degree of participation in the electoral process. Unfortunately, these results have not been achieved. Data indicate that voters who request the delivery of their ballot over the internet actually cast those ballots at a 12% lower rate than those requesting their ballot be sent by mail. It seems likely that a system enacted for the sake of convenience has unintentionally introduced obstacles and confusion into the process. The delivery of a ballot via internet is not inherently a fail-safe system; errors in the entry of an email address, overzealous spam filters, and simple volume of recipients' emails can lead to ballots not arriving as requested, or being overlooked by voters. Voters may also be unaware that internet delivery still necessitates printing and mailing a ballot; this introduces two additional points of failure. They may not initially be aware that printing is required, and may not own a printer, or have only a non-functioning printer. These may seem like small inconveniences or obstacles easily overcome, but when occurring in concert, or when experienced by a voter who is busy, lacks technological fluency, , they can render participation in the electoral process more difficult—the opposite of the law's original intent.

In addition to introducing obstacles into the voting experience, the existing absentee balloting system introduces risk. After the broad-based interference in the 2016 elections, the recent fiasco during the Iowa caucuses, and the system outages here in Maryland, which caused slowdowns when loading voter registration information, it is imperative that the government instill greater confidence in the electoral system through the support of time-tested measures, which are more familiar to voters and which entail a lower level of risk.

I strongly support HB859. This legislation minimizes vulnerabilities, offers a less complex, more manageable system for most voters desiring to vote absentee, and ensures that those voters who truly need to receive a ballot via internet email may still do so.

Warm Regards,

Alex Garcia  
Democratic State Central Committee  
District 43