

HB 881 - Election Law - Voting by Absentee Ballot - Prepaid Postage for Return of Ballots
House Ways and Means Committee
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FAVORABLE

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Good afternoon, Chair Kaiser and fellow distinguished committee members. Thank you for allowing me to submit testimony before the committee. I am Lawrence Carroll, State Legislative Liaison for the Maryland State Association of Letter Carriers, member of the National Association of Letter Carriers, AFL-CIO.

As the NALC Maryland State Legislative Director, I am writing in support of the pending bill that is the subject of today's hearing; HB 881. This bill will require that certain envelopes required to be used by voters voting by absentee ballot to return their ballots include prepaid postage. The Maryland State Association of Letter Carriers and the National Association of Letter Carriers fully support this bill.

By providing the return postage on the absentee ballots to the Board of Election will remove a significant barrier to Maryland's voters, in particular the low propensity voters. For instance, one subgroup of the low propensity voter are the younger voters. Young adults do not use mail to the extent that the older citizens do; to pay bills for instance. As a result, they may not have a supply of postage stamps at their home, may not know where they can purchase postage stamps, and may not have the work schedule that allows them time to make such a purchase. In short requiring the voter to purchase and use a postage stamp to return their ballot places an obstacle in the way of the voter and them casting their vote.

By providing a pre-paid ballot envelope increases the accessibility of the voter to participate in our democratic elections; a citizen participation which is vital to all of our civic institutions and our democracy. This measure puts a ballot box at every front door, every apartment box and at the end of every driveway. Voting is the foundation of our democracy. By eliminating the postage "poll tax", Maryland is taking an important step to dismantle a barrier that keeps some registered Maryland voters from exercising their right to vote.

We should be doing everything in our power to improve access to democracy. I am confident that prepaid postage will go a long way towards doing just that by breaking down barriers to participation.

The National Association of Letter Carriers recognizes that there is a cost associated with this measure. However, as the popularity of voting at home increases, the cost of pre-paid postage will be offset by the reduction in costs associated with physical polling locations: building space, staff, and machinery. If the goal is to encourage all voters to vote at home by voting by mail, consider the experience of Oregon. The state that has led the nation in removing voting barriers for its citizens. In 1992 the cost per voter in their general election was \$1.62, with the cost per ballot at \$1.92. In 2016, the cost per voter in the general election was \$1.91 and the cost per ballot was \$2.40. Voting at home is not only good for our democracy by allowing maximum access to the ballot box for all registered voters, but voting at home is

cost effective. As Maryland transitions to an all Vote At Home model, more registered voters will vote and the cost of Maryland elections will stabilize.

Maryland voters and voters all over this country are already taking advantage of voting by mail. In the 2018 election, we witnessed a significant increase in mail-in ballots; 27% of all votes cast nationwide were cast with a mail-in ballot. Americans are attracted to the flexibility, convenience, and safety of voting by mail. In Maryland, the voters are also voting in support of the mail-in ballot. In the 2014 off-year election over 54,000 mail-ballots were received statewide. In 2018 that number surged to more than 120,000 mail-ballots received; more than double of the previous off-year election. The increasing popularity of the absentee ballot in Maryland is irreversible. Maryland can go a long way to assist their voters afford the right to vote at home by enacting HB 881.

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