

February 18, 2021

Testimony on SB 525
Baltimore City – Centralized Booking Facility – Voting Information and Early Voting Polling Place
Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

Position: Favorable w/ Amendments

Common Cause Maryland supports SB 525 which would establish an early voting center in the Baltimore City Central Booking and Intake Center.

Voting should be accessible to all eligible voters - including those who are incarcerated. We have a responsibility as a state to ensure these voters are aware of their right to vote and, more importantly, provided with meaningful access to voting.

SB 525 aims to provide meaningful access to voting, but the proposed legislation does not go far enough. We have a responsibility to ensure all eligible voters temporarily residing in these facilities throughout the state have access to voting information and voting. During the 2020 general election, advocates were able to work with the State Board of Elections to provide some access to voting and we should be working to build on those efforts instead of focusing on one specific jurisdiction. We urge the committee to ensure all facilities have access to voting and voting information as proposed in other legislation, even if Baltimore City shifts to a voting center model.

We also have a few logistical concerns. SB 525 reads as a permanent program instead of a pilot. We urge the committee to require reporting after both the primary and the general, collecting data on the number of eligible incarcerated voters choosing to vote and any issues that may arise at the early voting location. The pilot plan should also include an oversight plan, including access on all days of voting for certified challengers and watchers. Also require that after the election year, there is a process for reviewing the overall success of the program and possibility of expanding to other facilities throughout the state.

We understand the Baltimore City administration has concerns regarding overall costs and implementation of the proposed program. If those concerns have not been addressed, we urge the committee to instead prioritize SB 224 which would provide access to voting information and mail-in voting materials to all eligible incarcerated individuals, including those in the Baltimore City Central Booking and Intake Center.

We urge a favorable report, with the suggested amendments.