

REPRESENT MARYLAND

#FIGHT FOR DEMOCRACY

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BILL: SB0036

BILL TITLE: Election Integrity Act

BILL SPONSOR: Senator Gallion

COMMITTEE: Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

POSITION: FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS

HEARING DATE: 2/18/2021

TESTIMONY IN FAVOR WITH AMENDMENTS FOR SB0036

While giving voters the opportunity to let their voices be heard by allowing family or household members to turn in their ballots or pick them up is very much needed, limiting it to just those two parties is not sufficient to ensure that everyone would still have equal access to voting enough. As a social worker, I have worked with a number of people who have a very small circle that they can rely on to assist with certain tasks. Not everyone has interactions with family members often or lives with someone. In addition, a fair number from that population do not always have access to transportation or have someone reliable to transport them to turn in their ballots.

While I support the premise of this bill that partisan actors shouldn't be collecting ballots, widening the list of people who can assist those that are limited in accessing their voting right is an essential amendment for HB0690. I work at an agency where our clients rely on their community worker to assist with accessing benefits and resources, sometimes even driving them to appointments or to gather essential items from a store or food bank. It is, quite literally, their sole purpose: to help the client become a more independent and functional member of society. How better to do that than assist with voting?

Where I work, these community workers are called PRP (psychiatric rehabilitation program) counselors. But they are not the only group that helps voters. Many voters are elderly or have certain physical and mental limitations and may be aided by a home health aide, PRP counselor, residential caseworker, etc. In addition, we believe the State Board of Elections should create a program to provide non-partisan volunteers to assist voters in casting their ballot.

Expanding this bill to include allowing helpers outside of a family or household bubble would make this bill more inclusive and encourage more people to exercise their right to vote. It will give true meaning to what democracy should stand for. If HB0690 is amended to ensure everyone still has easy access to voting through non-partisan means, I would urge a favorable report out of committee.

Sincerely,
Cristi Demnowicz, Chair
Represent Maryland
Maryland Voter-LD07

Represent Maryland is a grassroots anti-corruption group of citizen advocates that #FightForDemocracy in Maryland. Our democracy solutions include: Public Election Funds, Independent Redistricting, Special Elections, Ranked Choice Voting, Increased Ethics and Transparency, and Increased Voter Participation.

Learn more about our work at www.RepresentMaryland.org
Authorized by Represent Maryland PAC, T Miller, Treasurer