

March 23, 2021

Testimony on HB 247
Election Law - Voting Order Priority - Individuals Who Need Extra Assistance
Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

Position: Favorable

Common Cause Maryland supports HB 247, which would require a chief election judge to make reasonable accommodations to ensure that disabled voters and voters with children or disabled children are able to vote without discomfort.

The long wait times experienced by many Marylanders voters in prior elections – including this past election – created an unnecessary barrier to voting, especially for those voters unable to stand for long periods to time. Two or three hour waits in the cold, standing or waiting in a long line, is a tremendous physical hardship for voters with disabilities. Additionally, voters with young children, especially children with special needs, who can't secure reliable and affordable childcare before going to the polls can especially experience difficulty if polling place lines are long, requiring additional time away from home in a long line with children. This bill would allow those voters to move to the front of the line to vote, ensuring that they are not unduly impacted by long lines at the polls.

Suggested amendment: Voters should be made aware of all assistance available when voting in person, including the placeholder option. Clear signage both inside and outside of polling locations, in addition to improved training for judges, will help to ensure that goal. We encourage incorporating images into these signs for those voters who are unable to read. These signs should also be made available in multiple languages, ensuring voters whose first language is not English are also made aware of the assistance available to them. We also recommend prioritizing the placeholder option before allowing a voter to advance to the front of the line.

While we encourage continued action to reduce the lines and wait times for all voters, we feel this is an important issue to address. Voting is a fundamental right and we appreciate the continued focus by this committee in ensuring access to voting for all citizens.

We support HB 247 and urge a favorable vote.