

The Honorable Paul Pinsky, Chairman
And Members of the
Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee
Senate of Maryland
Annapolis, Maryland

RE: SB 831- Election Reform Act – Oppose

Dear Chairman Pinsky and Members of the Committee,

I am opposed to SB 831 provisions on absentee ballots. I am opposed to beginning to count votes 15 days prior to Election Day and to allowing a voter to submit a corrected an absentee ballot up to 10 days following election day. How far after the election will citizens have to wait for election results? I believe such a delay in completing the vote count will cause confusion for voters and undermine the confidence of voters in election results and reduce voter participation.

On Page 26 of SB 831 beginning on line 17, the bill describes a process for notifying a voter that there is an omission or error on their ballot. I object strongly to this section of the bill.

Currently the process for counting absentee ballots is to separate the ballot from the envelope before reviewing the ballot using a team of one Democrat and one Republican. One person opens the envelope and hands the ballot to the other team member. The 2nd person reviews the ballot for completeness and correctness. The envelope with the voter's name is kept separate so that the ballot is secret. Under SB 831 – you would have to keep the envelope with the voter's identification with the ballot to be able to advise them of any errors or omissions. Multiple people would be involved in the process of advising the voter of the error or omission. The voter's choices would no longer be private and their right to a secret ballot would be violated. The voter could be intimidated if they thought someone would know how they voted. Privacy of a citizen's ballot is always a very serious concern, but particularly so in today's hyper-partisan political atmosphere where anyone with a different point of view can be painted as a domestic terrorist.

On Page 27 of the bill is a provision that if two completed ballots are received from a voter the first properly filled-out ballot is to be counted. What happens if a voter shows up on election day and states that they did not vote by an absentee ballot? Currently voter signature verification is not carried out for absentee ballot applications or ballots. This is another problem with starting to count absentee ballots 15 days prior to the election.

On the section of the bill that requires Federal candidates to take part in at least one public debate—a great idea—but the question is can Maryland State law require a Federal candidate to actually take part in a public debate?

The requirements for State Board of Elections meetings are positive, but overall the bill is too broad and the provisions on absentee ballots are unacceptable.

Please delete the sections on absentee ballots and ballot counting or give SB 831 an UNFAVORABLE Report.

Sincerely,

Ella Ennis

P.O. Box 437

Port Republic, MD 20676

E-mail: eee437@comcast.net