

March 25, 2021

Testimony on HB 656
Election Law - Early Voting Centers - Accessibility by Public Transportation
Education, Health & Environmental Affairs

Position: Favorable

Common Cause Maryland is in support of HB 656 which would require that early voting centers be located near a public transportation station or stop.

Early voting was established to drive participation and make voting more convenient. While the program has been a success and has seen a surge in the number of Marylanders voting early, we are leaving those with tight work schedules and family obligations behind. This legislation would provide individuals easy access to early voting sites, eliminating the barrier of transportation for many voters.

Pew Research Center found that out of the registered voters who did not vote in 2016, 14% cited being busy or conflicting schedule, 12% were ill or disabled, 8% were out of town or away from home, 3% had transportation problems, and 2% cited inconvenient hours or polling places.

During the 2018 gubernatorial general election, more people voted than ever before with early voting more than doubling compared to turnout in 2014. This was also the case during the 2020 general election where even with the increase in mail voting, those choosing to vote in-person did so during the early voting period. But even with the increase in early voting, Maryland needs to ensure those locations are accessible to all eligible voters. HB 656 aims to do just that by requiring early voting centers be placed near public transportation stations or stops. This increase accessibility will build on the success of the program, helping to improve participation throughout the state.

We need to do everything we can to remove barriers to exercising the right to vote. HB 656 would help to do that by ensuring all voters are provided with better access to early voting locations.

We urge a favorable report.