

REPRESENT MARYLAND

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BILL: SB0271

BILL TITLE: Election Law - Voting Systems - Accessibility for Voters With Disabilities

BILL SPONSOR: Senator Lam

COMMITTEE: EHEA

POSITION: Favorable with amendments

HEARING DATE: February 18, 2021

TESTIMONY ON SB0271

Represent Maryland believes that voting is a right and that our government should do everything it can to make it equitably accessible to all. In theory, we support this bill. However, without more specific information in the bill, we believe it could lead to future problems in our elections.

Through research, we've found there are several types of "ballot marking devices." Some mark a traditional paper ballot, while others create a paper chit from a touch screen. Maryland currently has a paper ballot law, and voters understand that to be a piece of paper or cardstock that they mark, which is then fed into an optical scanner for recording. With the full paper ballots that Maryland currently uses, election irregularities are infrequent and can be sorted out quickly.

We believe, as written, there is room to change the understanding of what a paper ballot is, from the common understanding of a full size paper ballot to something that compiles a voter's votes onto a printed chit from input on a touchscreen. These systems are less secure and have led to accusations of vote swapping in other states. They rely on a level of external programming that our current system doesn't need, which opens them up to many potential problems.

Represent Maryland supports making the actual physical process of voting more accessible to all. However, we believe this law needs more specific information about what ballot marking device will be used. We want to ensure that the end result isn't one that undoes the security that our paper ballot law created. None of us are experts in technology or accessibility, but a number of members have suggested something like a large bingo dabber that is easy to hold and marks ballots clearly, which are then scanned.

We ask the sub-committee to amend this bill to have more specific information about the type of ballot marking device Maryland would use, if the bill is passed.

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