



ARCHDIOCESE OF BALTIMORE † ARCHDIOCESE OF WASHINGTON † DIOCESE OF WILMINGTON

February 18, 2021

Senate Bill 271

Election Law – Voting Systems – Accessibility for Voters With Disabilities

Senate Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee

Position: SUPPORT

The Maryland Catholic Conference represents the public policy interests of the three Roman Catholic (arch)dioceses serving Maryland: the Archdiocese of Baltimore, the Archdiocese of Washington, and the Diocese of Wilmington, which together encompass over one million Marylanders.

Senate Bill 271 requires all voters, including voters with disabilities, be issued a standard sized ballot and that all polling systems be fully accessible. This bill ensures that Maryland citizens with disabilities receive the same access and privacy while voting afforded to all other Marylanders.

The Maryland Catholic Conference supports SB271 because it intersects with the Church's obligation to protect the rights of those with disabilities. In the last several elections, disabled Marylanders were issued different ballot forms from the standard and polling places only had to provide a single accessible voting system. This procedure singled out people with disabilities for unequal treatment, made their ballots easily distinguishable from the norm and infringed on their right to a private ballot. Policies should protect the full participation of people with disabilities in the voting process and equal access to fundamental rights.

Pope Francis has urged "protection for the rights of people with disabilities," urging "to make the world more human by removing everything that prevents them from full citizenship, the obstacles of prejudice, and by promoting accessibility to places and a quality of life that take into account all the dimensions of the human being." (*Message for the International Day for Persons with Disabilities 2019*)

For these reasons, the Maryland Catholic Conference urges a favorable report on **SB271**. Thank you for your consideration.