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Ways and Means Committee

Education Subcommittee

Finance Resources Subcommittee



The Maryland House of Delegates
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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

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Support HB247- Election Law – Voting Order Priority – Individuals who Need Extra Assistance

Dear Chairwoman Kaiser and Members of the Ways and Means Committee,

Thank you for your consideration of HB 247. This is a re-introduction of HB 142 from the 2020 Legislative Session in its amended language that passed this Committee the House unanimously. This legislation requires a chief election judge to give voting priority order to citizens who need extra assistance at the polls based on guidelines developed by the State Board of Elections. The legislation is intended to encourage those who would be unable to comfortably wait in long lines to participate fully in the political process. HB 247 requires that polling places post visible notices that special assistance is available if requested and that election judges allow voters for whom it may be extremely difficult or painful to wait in line to request expedited check-in and ballot issuance.

The National Organization on Disability reports that individuals with disabilities are between 12-20% less likely to vote than those without challenges and are seriously underrepresented at the polls. Sadly, those who have the most trouble voting tend to become discouraged and disenfranchised, but may actually need a voice in our political system the most. While discussing this bill, I have been surprised by how many people believe that accessibility is not a real issue at the polls and that those who have difficulty should just vote by mail. This view is contrary to the spirit of voter accessibility and inclusion and to the Help America Vote Act of 2002 which requires states to provide the same opportunity for access and independence to all voters and mandates that any alternative must offer voters with disabilities the same opportunity to vote in person as other citizens.

A primary obstacle to voting for the disabilities community includes problems with accessibility and long lines according to the Governmental Accountability Office. It is important to note that while a 1-2 hour wait may be an annoying inconvenience to many of us, for someone with a disability or a child with a disability it may be a painful and insurmountable impediment.

I am grateful for the energies of the Election sub-committee and Chair Nick Mosby for working with me and the Board of Elections to ensure that this bill was acceptable to all parties last session. I urge this committee to once again pass this legislation. This bill will allow all of our citizens to participate fully in the political process.

Sincerely,

Delegate Michele Guyton