

March 9, 2021

Testimony on HB 1345
Mail-In Voting - Certification of Assistance, Design of Materials, and Ballot Curing
Ways and Means

Position: Favorable

Common Cause Maryland supports HB 1345 which would improve the usability, design, and accessibility of our mail-in voting materials, making the voting experience less confusing for those choosing to vote by mail.

During the 2020 election cycle, Maryland experienced a larger-than-average demand for mail-in voting due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Election changes were being made quickly and we knew that many voters would be using the mail-in voting process for the first time. We quickly shifted our voter education efforts to ensure voters knew that ballots were on the way and how to properly complete and return their ballot. In our conversations with voters, we found that many just were confused about the mail-in voting process. The instructions were confusing, the translated materials did not match instructional images on the materials, they were multiples pages that just seemed to cause more confusion, and others never realized a ballot came in the mail. The process became stressful for many who wanted to ensure they were completing the process correctly and voting the way they intended.

The mail-in voting experience needs to be improved and HB 1345 aims to do this by requiring the State Board of Elections establish a consistent design for mail-in voting materials. This design would implement best practice for use of plain language and require regular updates. It would also require an envelope template that provides greater privacy for voters with a template that can incorporate non-English languages.

Improving the design and usability of mail-in voting materials will make the overall process more seamless for voters and ensure that voters can vote the way they intend. Plain language use will help voters make fewer mistakes when completing and returning their ballots. More than 38,000 mail-in ballots were rejected in the 2020 election cycle and thousands more in previous elections. Many of the mistakes could have been avoided with more clear instructions, helping to reduce the rejection rate of ballots.

HB 1345 would also establish a process for “curing” ballots. While majority of these ballots were rejected during the primary and mostly due to late receipt, many of these ballots could have been accepted with a clear curing process in place. A process for curing would provide for a window of time in which voters can correct their mistake for reasons varying from missing signatures to identification to ensure their vote still counts. HB 1345 would ensure the State Board of Elections establishes a process to notify voter of a problem with an opportunity to correct the problem. This process will ensure those who intend to vote are able to have their voices heard in that election.

We urge a favorable report.