

January 26, 2021

Testimony on HB 341
Election – Absentee Ballot Canvass – Start and Release of Tabulation
Ways and Means

Position: Favorable w/ Amendments

Common Cause Maryland supports HB 341 which would allow for the pre-processing of mail-in ballots, beginning 14 days before Election Day.

As more Maryland voters begin to use mail-in ballots, allowing for the pre-processing of ballots will ensure elections officials are not overwhelmed with mail ballots after Election Day. The increase in time to process mail-in ballots also allows for results to be made available much sooner.

While we support HB 341, the primary benefit of preprocessing ballot is that it allows for ballot curing or better ballot tracking which is not addressing in the bill. As we saw during the 2020 election, even with robust public education efforts voters may forget to sign oath on their return envelope. These voters should be provided with an opportunity to cure their ballot at least during this 14-day window. We should also ensure the State Board of Elections is using a better process for tracking ballots, allowing voters to check on the status in real-time.

We recognize that this process would include pre-processing ballots delivered electronically that have to be duplicated by a bipartisan team. Similar to the 2020 election, we believe the local boards can work to ensure the process remains transparent.

We urge a favorable report and hope the committee will consider our amendment to allow for curing and improved ballot tracking.