



TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE

HB 963 – Election Law – Absentee Ballots – Signature Verification and Verification Statements and Unsigned Ballot Statements

POSITION: Informational Only

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The League of Women Voters of Maryland, a nonpartisan organization with 1500 members, supports offering all registered voters the option of voting by mail (absentee) so long as best practices are followed. As this choice becomes increasingly popular across the state, we recognize that the issues of signature curing and verification must be addressed.

However, there are many technical, fiscal, political, and social factors to consider when planning a system that all Marylanders will perceive as effective yet fair. Here are some of the most important:

Successful implementation will entail a significant statewide investment in equipment and training for the local Boards of Elections. In states and counties elsewhere that check signatures, specially trained verification judges make final decisions, though automated verification is employed (if legally authorized) when warranted by the quantity of ballots. The major manufacturers of election hardware, including ES&S and Runbeck, all license the same signature recognition software with a reputation for being efficient and robust. Ballots can be sorted based on their “similarity score” to digitized images already on file. According to the vendors, though, such automation is only cost-justifiable when mail-in ballot volumes are regularly 50,000 or more, because the bulky sorting equipment can run to \$100,000. How will the state ensure that training is uniform, and how will the costs be allocated?

Changing our voting process to include this new element will require intensive voter education and outreach. Many Marylanders who prefer absentee voting, including the elderly and those with disabilities, have legitimate concerns about the impact of signature verification on their ability to cast a ballot. What accommodations will be made to ensure accessibility?

We strongly recommend establishing a work group to study signature issues for mail-in voting. Such a work group should include bipartisan members of the legislature and selected staff, Board of Elections officials, advocates for the disabled and for minority populations, and other appropriate participants. The group could recommend procedures for checking signatures and standards for equipment procurement. A starting point could be the excellent guidelines in the federal Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency’s document “Signature Verification and Cure Process.”¹

The League of Women Voters of Maryland urges the committee to take this information into consideration when evaluating HB 963.

¹ https://www.cisa.gov/sites/default/files/publications/signature-verification_cure_process_final_508.pdf