

January 31, 2022

Testimony on HB 212
Election Law – Absentee Ballots – Requests and Signature Verification
Ways and Means

Position: Unfavorable

Common Cause Maryland opposes HB 212 which would require more stringent proof of identification and signature requirements for mail-in voting, effectively shutting eligible voters out of our election process.

It should be noted that legislation of this nature aims to solve an issue that doesn't exist in our state – voter fraud. In a myriad of studies conducted over the past 20 years, virtually no voter fraud was found; in fact, the risk of disenfranchisement of eligible voters from vulnerable communities far outweighs any evidence of voter fraud in Maryland. Studies have further shown that in jurisdictions where these needless and burdensome policies have been enacted, there has been a significant negative impact on the ability of countless qualified voters to have their ballots counted.

Maryland law already requires individuals that plan to vote to swear, under the penalty of perjury, that he or she is a citizen as part of the registration process. The addition of new documentation requirements threatens to slow down the ballot request process for registered voters and make it impossible for our most vulnerable populations to exercise their civic rights. Those without ID are disproportionately likely to be Black, Latino, low-income voters, young adults, senior citizens, and people with disabilities.

Signature verification, as we see in other states, has the potential to disenfranchise marginalized populations throughout the state – including voters with disabilities, voters whose first language is not English, elderly voters, young voters, LGBTQ+ voters, and many more. Common Cause Maryland supports a robust, secure election system that encourages the maximum participation among eligible voters in the state.

HB 212 does nothing to advance those goals and would likely significantly impede them. For those reasons, we urge the committee to give HB 212 an unfavorable report.