

VOTE 4MORE!

Baltimore County Council Districts

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Testimony Before Ways and Means Committee Electronic Signature Use For Petitions

Prepared By Linda Dorsey-Walker, MBA, Chair
4MORE! 4BALTIMORECOUNTY Ballot Issue Committee

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Good afternoon Madam Chair and members of the Ways and Means Committee. I am Linda Dorsey-Walker. I come before you as a private citizen who is Chair of 4MORE! 4BALTIMORECOUNTY Ballot Issue Committee, a group that started one year ago and is endorsed by 30 organizations. I wish to testify IN FAVOR OF HB1112 with the following two friendly Amendments.

AMENDMENT 1 - SECTION 2. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, That this Act shall take effect [October] June 1, 2023.

This would also make HB1112 consistent with HB 0645 (the "Election Law - Electronic Ballot Return System).

AMENDMENT 2 - 6-208.1. 17 (A) IN AN EFFORT TO ASSURE TRANSPARENCY IN THE PETITION PROCESS, A PETITION SPONSOR SHALL BE GIVEN THE RIGHT TO SUBMIT ONE TENTH OF THE MINIMUM NUMBER OF REQUIRED SIGNATURES TO THE LOCAL BOARD OF ELECTIONS FOR REVIEW AND FEEDBACK REGARDING THE SUFFICIENCY OF SIGNATURES COLLECTION IN AN EFFECT TO ASSURE ACCURACY AND COMPLETENESS OF ALL ADDITIONAL SIGNATURES.

The 4MORE! 4BALTIMORECOUNTY Ballot Initiative, also known as VOTE4MORE!, is attempting to amend the Baltimore County Charter to create four more County Council districts and thereby reduce district sizes from the largest in Maryland 123,00 per down to 78,000. Thus would expand opportunities for women, minorities, young adults, and other under-represented groups to serve on the Council County where we presently have zero women and just one minority serving.

Under the presently rules we need 10,000 certifiable in-person, face to face petition signatures in order to get the referendum question added to the November 2024 General Election ballot. The current paper ballot petition system is archaic and goes against how most Americans now live.

Using an electronic or digital signature, as propose by the bill as an additional, not a replacement option, is not a new or unfamiliar idea, as the SBE previously approved the digital collection of petition signatures needed in 2020 and 2021.

- 1) On the January 27, 2022 SBE meeting we were advised to collect in-person signatures at shopping malls, churches, subways, community meetings, fairs, events, and by knocking on doors. More than one member stated that collecting in- person petition signatures in today's

environment and the myriad of unique identifying information is no more different than campaigning door to door and handing them a flyer. That is simply not true.

2) Now, one year after kicking off our Ballot initiative, it is important that a reality check be provided.

3) The process of collecting all the personal information required for in-person petition signatures is very difficult.

4) While the Election law states that ballot petition committee requires 10,000 signatures to have a referendum question placed on a ballot, we were advised from the start by SBE staff that we should collect a minimum of 25% to 30 % more signatures than that because they routinely disallow those many thousands of names, as a matter of historic experience and practice. That sounds like a 25% design-in failure rate, making the process 25% more cumbersome, arduous, time consuming and expensive.

5) Last year a well-funded ballot initiative in Anne Arundel generated and submitted 11,000 signatures, more than enough. Organizers waited nearly a then nearly a month to learn that of the 11,000 signatures 5, 532 signatures were disallowed - a 51% rate, which was possibly the highest petition disallowance rates in the entire U.S. last year. Where is the oversight for this?

- 6) In late May 2022 the 4MORE! Ballot Issue Committee attempted to turn in the first 2000 signatures it collected for review through the random sampling process to avoid the very scenario the Anne Arundel County ballot Committee later faced in August when there was no opportunity to cure or add additional signatures. Our request for an early partial review was refused.
- 7) The high signature disallowances rates, we have been told, is because many petition signers fail to spout back their voter information exactly as it appears on the SBE website. This information may come from a period two, three, or four decades earlier.
- 8) Despite adding a QR Code to our flyer that takes signers to the SBE website to check their voter information, we were nevertheless told to expect a similar rejection rate.
- 9) The implementation of electronic signatures would bring that error or rejection rate down to near zero because, as is the case when you file to establish a ballot issue committee. After entering one of three unique identifiers numbers, (last four digits of your SS number; MD Driver's License number; or your voters card number), the software application does not allow a signer to submit their petition signature unless there is complete agreement with the SBE record.

10) The digital signature method greatly reduces local board of elections costs, is a major time saver and safer for their office staff because there would be zero staff required to scan, review and make judgements about thousands of pieces of possibly contaminated paper.

11) When electronic signatures were use there was not a single accusation of fraud there was no clamor by the public to force every person to return to in-person signatures, not one person complained about their privacy rights being disregarded or too much personal information collected, and no disabled person claimed their right to an accessible petition process was ignored.

12) The fact is, there is not a higher risk of fraud when signatures are collected electronically, because there is an immediate and increased ability to check the validity of information provided by a petition signer

An electronic format not only allows greater privacy, but also the ability to read the petition language over and before signing.

From a public safety and public health standpoint, collecting signature electronically is cleaner, fairer, and more transparent for individuals who are disabled and have may have limited flexible use of their hands, for seniors who has limited visual acuity, which is necessary to read the very closely

printed lines on the State form which is designed to collect five pieces of information from five individuals.

The following states already allow electronic petition signing.*

Massachusetts - On April 29, 2020, [Massachusetts](#) became the first state to allow campaigns to collect electronic signatures and remote signatures.^{[5]*}

Michigan - On April 13, 2020, Fair and Equal Michigan said the petition campaign was transitioning to gathering electronic signatures citing that "There's no requirement that it be a manual signature. (Or) that it be in ink or that a pen be used or that it be personally affixed to the petition paper.*"

Utah - In 2010 that electronic signatures were valid and that they needed to be recognized by state election officials. Ballot initiatives were not explicitly discussed in the ruling.^{[7]*}

Boulder, Colorado

In November 2018, voters in [Boulder, Colorado](#), approved a citizen initiative that authorized the city council to adopt ordinances allowing electronic signatures for initiatives, referendums, and recall petitions.^{[8]*}

Denver, Colorado

In 2015, the city of [Denver, Colorado](#), introduced eSign, a mobile petition-signing application used for candidate nominating petitions. The city stated that this was the first electronic petition app of its kind in the nation.^{[9]*}

I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report on HB 1112 with the recommended friendly amendments.

*SOURCE; BALLOTPEDIA

Respectfully Submitted,

Linda Dorsey-Walker, Chair