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www.DisabilityRightsMD.org

WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE

February 17, 2023

HB 616– Election Law – Early Voting – Number of Days

Position: OPPOSE

Disability Rights Maryland (DRM – formerly Maryland Disability Law Center) is the Protection & Advocacy agency in Maryland, mandated to advance the civil rights of people with disabilities. DRM works to increase opportunities for Marylanders with disabilities to be part of their communities through voting by advocating for equal and equitable access to the ballot.

Disability Rights Maryland (DRM) **opposes** HB 616 which will shorten the number of days available for early voting. Currently, voters can cast their ballot during early voting starting 2 Thursdays before Election Day to the Thursday before Election Day. Early voting accommodates voters who cannot make it to their assigned polling location on Election Day. Early voting allows them to plan ahead and vote in the 8 days preceding Election Day at an early voting center in their county providing great flexibility for in person voting.

HB 616 seeks to shorten the timeline for early voting, threatening access to the ballot for every day working Marylanders on the basis of low voter turnout on weekends. Whether it is true early voting numbers are lower on the weekend than weekdays, shortening the number of days a voter can cast their ballot early will only threaten access to the ballot and inspire confusion for voters. Additionally, almost 20% of voters utilize the full week of early voting to cast their ballot.

In the past, early voting in Maryland has been lengthened and shortened based on various factors. However, since 2014, early voting rules and procedures been consistent, with early voting starting the 2 Thursdays before the primary or general election up until the Thursday before election day with polls opening from 8 AM to 8 PM. For almost a decade, voters, election judges, election administrators and advocates have confidence in the usual procedures regarding early voting. If there is nothing wrong with our current procedures, there is no reason to change it for reasons of low turnout.

Many Marylanders utilize early voting to gain an in person experience of voting, particularly for voters with disabilities who may want to avoid the haywire of Election Day. Having all 8 days



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for early voting allows for them to coordinate with caretakers, coordinate transportation and have a plan when they arrive at an early vote center. Shortening the days available for early voting will restrict the timeline for voters who need time to plan and coordinate their in person voting experience. Shortening the days of early voting will also harm Marylanders who have to work often, might have to coordinate childcare and transportation in order to cast a ballot. The current length of 8 days for early voting provides flexibility and assurance that those who want an in person voting experience can do so. For these reasons, we urge an **unfavorable** report on HB 616. Please contact me at SamuelaA@DisabilityRightsMD.Org or 443-692-2512 if you have any questions.