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 Baltimore City Green Party
 HB 1112
 Favorable

Our governmental system in Maryland is a balance of direct democracy and representative democracy. Registered voters have rights associated with both.

The representative democracy side of the equation is more familiar to most people: major party candidates run in party primaries, then go on to general elections, then go on to govern. This is an area that has seen much needed reform and modernization over the years, and this committee has done great work to protect and advance the rights of voters, especially after the lessons learned from the elections during the COVID state of emergency.

The direct democracy system in Maryland, in which voters use petitions in order to put small parties, independent candidates, charter amendments or referendums on the ballot is not as well known and has not been the beneficiary of the good lawmaking that other parts of the electoral system have received.

The Current Process

Currently all petition signatures are gathered on paper forms; the form is old and hard to use. It has not gone through the usability improvements many of the more heavily used forms have undergone with the State Board and the University of Baltimore.

Voters are required “to sign the individual’s name as it appears on the Statewide voter registration list or the individual’s surname of registration and at least one full given name and the initials of any other names.”

This is how the form collects each voters information

this petition. SBE 6-201-1C (Rev 11-2011)

Please Note: The information you provide on this petition is public information and may be used to change your voter registration address.

1	Print Name:	First Name	Middle Name	Last Name		Birth Date:	Month	Date	Year
	Signature:						Month	Date	Year
	Maryland Residence Address:	Street Number	Street Name	Apt. No.	City or Town	Zip			

The form has space for five of these signature blocks on it, and nearly all voters fill out the forms in handwriting with ink pens.

Upon submission of the petitions, the local board then has 20 days to review each petition page and each hand written signature block using a 9 page rubric with about 20 different possible dispositions.

https://elections.maryland.gov/petitions/Petition_verification_Procedures.pdf

Signatures can be disregarded for any number of subjective reasons and voters have no awareness of when their signature has been rejected.

If a petitioner wants to challenge the determination of the S/LBE they must do so via judicial review, within 10 days of the determination by the S/LBE.

If this described any other part of our electoral process, people across the political spectrum would be rightly upset and demanding modernization.

Benefits of the Bill

This bill provides many needed improvements to protect and advance the rights of voters to participate in the direct democracy system.

- **Electronic Signatures:** During the COVID state of emergency the State Board of Elections allowed voters to sign petitions using electronic signatures. Bringing this form in line with the other forms voters can sign electronically makes it easier for voters to exercise their rights.
- **Conventional Name Standards:** Allowing a William to sign as Bill as long as the information can be reasonably linked to a voter is a common sense practice, that makes it less likely that voters' expression of support gets discarded.
- **Removes criminal penalties for double signatures:** Signature campaigns can last up to two years, voters do not always remember if they have signed previously, and imposing a criminal penalty on that second signature is antiquated and chilling, especially when the second signature can simply be disregarded.
- **Clarifying that the Date of Birth Is Optional:** The form currently includes date of Birth as a field, many people are hesitant to provide this information, but also hesitant to not provide it, because it's not marked as optional. Clarifying the optional fields on the form allows voters to give the minimum necessary information.
- **Requiring the SBE/LBE to provide rejected signatures to petitioners in a timely manner:** The State of Maryland has asserted in District Court that when a petitioner challenges the determination of the State or Local Board regarding the sufficiency of signatures, the burden is on the petitioner to prove that S/LBE was wrong. In order to do this the petitioner must have access to the rejected signatures in a timely manner.
- **Allowing voters to cure rejected signatures :** Giving voters the ability to cure a rejected signature is a best practice in election related matters. It protects the intention and will of the voter over the administrative processes required to run elections and gives voters reasonable opportunity to correct errors that would otherwise nullify their expression of their rights.

For all of these reasons I urge the committee to provide a favorable report on HB 1112