



TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE

SB 824 - Election Law - Absentee Ballot Application - Sending to Eligible Voters Before Primary Elections

POSITION: Favorable with Amendments

BY: Linda Kohn, President

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The League of Women Voters representing members in every district of Maryland supports SB 824 and supports measures to involve every voter in Maryland in an easy and equitable process of voting. LWVMD's position on Voting Rights and Election Administration calls for an election system that is representative, feasible to implement and increases voter participation.

In Maryland, when Rockville used vote-by-mail for the first time in its 2019 Mayoral election, turnout almost doubled from about 16% in 2015 to about 31% in 2019.¹ In contrast, in Maryland's 2020 Primary Election, using VBM for the first time in a statewide contest, voter turnout was about the same as in the 2016 primary election at just over 40%.² These statistics show that, at most, vote by mail can greatly increase voter participation, or at least not hurt turnout.

The League knows that vote by mail has advantages; VBM can be helpful for senior citizens or voters living in rural or remote areas who may find it difficult to travel to vote. Vote by mail can also help younger voters who may move out of state, or out of district, and do not have the luxury of returning home for an election.

The State Board of Elections has already put into place procedures and policies around vote by mail this would add in another safeguard to ensuring that as many voters can vote as possible with whatever option works best for them. Many times voters will not always know if they can vote in person either during early voting or on the actual

¹ Rockville Board of Supervisors of Elections report on November 5, 2019 Election Report, April 6, 2020

²Department of Legislative Services, Office of Policy Analysis, "Covid-19 and Voting By Mail," Presentation to the Senate Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee and the House Committee Ways and Means, June 16, 2020.



election day. Voters always have the choice of requesting to vote by mail, but SB 824 would take the guess work out of going to the SBE website to request the ballot. It would also continue to educate Maryland voters that voting by mail is a safe option.

The League is very happy with this bill but in light of our support with expanding voter participation we would respectfully ask for an amendment to this bill that would establish SBE sending out a notice instead of an application before the primary *and* general elections.

LWVMD urges a favorable report with the above amendment for SB 824.