

February 27, 2024

Testimony on HB 1088
Election Law – Automatic Voter Registration - Alterations
Ways and Means

Position: Favorable

Common Cause Maryland is in support of HB 1088, which would upgrade our state’s voter registration system and help more eligible voters engage with our political system.

Marylanders already submit applications and supporting documents to an agency such as the MVA when they apply for a driver’s license. An upgraded “back-end” AVR system would identify when these materials clearly demonstrate that the customer is eligible to register to voter and/or update their current voter registration. The customer’s information is then automatically sent to election officials who follow up with a mailed notice about voter registration (including an option to decline to register altogether).

This new system of automatic voter registration will bring new voters from diverse communities into the political process - current MVA data indicates 30-40% of registered MD voters are not updating their voter registration address with the MVA, and less than half of unregistered MVA customers register to vote at the MVA - when other states (CO, OR, AK, NV, MA, DE) upgraded to SAVR (secure automatic voter registration), they doubled the rate of new registrations at their MVA, and more than doubled the rate for the youngest voters.

The bill also has provisions that ensure protection for non-citizen Marylanders by screening confirmed non-citizens out of voter registration questions, protecting them from making an inadvertent mistake with severe immigration consequences.

Voting is the most essential form of political expression, and the right to do so is fundamental to maintaining an open democracy. HB 1088 represents a small step forward in the fight to make voting easily accessible for all eligible Marylanders.

For these reasons, we request a favorable report.