

WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE

February 13, 2024

HB 641 – Election Law – Curbside Voting - Establishment

Position: SUPPORT

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.

DRM supports HB 641 which establishes a curbside voting location in every county at each early voting location and on election for voters who cannot enter a polling location, voters whose health may be impacted by entering a polling location. Curbside voting is to be made available to all registered voters with a disability. This will increase the methods of accessible voting in Maryland and expand access to the ballot for voters with disabilities.

Over the last few years, we have seen an increase in the number of voters with disabilities. In 2020, 62% of voters with disabilities cast a ballot, compared to 2016 where 56% of voters with disabilities cast a ballot.¹ We can attribute this increase to the variety of ways to cast a ballot, particularly mail in voting which allows a voter to send their ballot to the local board of elections through the mail without having to leave their homes. This was especially helpful during the pandemic where voters with disabilities are particularly susceptible to harm. 53% of voters with disabilities sent their ballots through the mail compared to the 42% of voters without disabilities who sent their ballots through the mail.²

Certainly, expanding methods of voting is beneficial for greater access to democracy, a fundamental right of all citizens and in the best interest of society for everyone to participate. As such, establishing curbside voting in Maryland will present additional opportunities for voters with disabilities to cast a ballot, a community that has been historically disenfranchised. Curbside voting will allow voters to express autonomy and make independent choices on their ballot with and request assistance if needed from the safety of their vehicle.

We are available should the State Board of Elections need technical assistance, guidance or resources in implementing curbside voting in Maryland, as there are currently 27 states that offer curbside voting. Additionally, we request the State Board of Elections report on curbside voting in Maryland.

¹ <https://www.eac.gov/news/2021/07/07/new-data-177-million-americans-disabilities-voted-2020-significant-increase-over>

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For these reasons, we urge a favorable report on HB 41. Please do not hesitate to contact me at davidp@disabilityrightsmd.org, or by phone at 443-692-2500.