

February 13, 2024

Testimony on HB 700
Election Law – Election Judges – Revisions
Ways & Means

Position: Favorable

Common Cause Maryland is in support of HB 700, which would help state and local election officials recruit and retain volunteers to serve in the vital role of election judge.

We know that our election judges serve a critical role in the functioning of our elections. We also know that, over the past few election cycles, election officials across the state have had trouble recruiting enough election judges. This has resulted in long lines to vote on Election Day. And with election judges facing a growing number of instances of intimidation, harassment, and threats related to the course of their duties, it is no wonder that roughly 11% of current officials say they are somewhat or very likely to resign before November 2024.

Having an adequate number of knowledgeable staffers at the polls is crucial to the safe and secure administration of our elections, and the steps outlined in this legislation – like a marketing and education plan target towards diverse and multilingual populations - would be a step in the right direction towards increasing local boards' ability to recruit and retain volunteers. The bill also encourages youth engagement with the electoral process by ensuring that public school students who choose to serve as an election judge may receive service-learning hours towards their graduation requirement as well as the regular election judge compensation. In addition to expanding the number of new people applying, incentives like this and the extra compensation for returning judges should help incentivize volunteers to keep coming back.

The changes outlined by HB 700 would help to recruit and retain election judges in Maryland, making the process of casting a ballot more convenient and accessible for all voters within the state. Recruiting an adequate number of election judges is a step towards protecting the electoral process for all, and for that reason, we recommend a favorable report.