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Committee: Ways and Means
Testimony on: HB 1109 Election Law – Registered Voter List and Petitions (Ballot Petition Modernization Act)
Position: Favorable
Hearing Date: March 5, 2024

The Maryland Chapter of the Sierra Club urges a favorable report on HB 1109, which modernizes the law and processes associated with election-related petitions. Specifically, the bill:

- authorizes electronic signatures on petitions;
- repeals restrictions on the way a voter signs their name;
- provides a process for a voter to correct a deficiency so their signature can be counted; and
- repeals a misdemeanor for signing a petition more than once (only a voter’s first validated signature will be counted).

The Sierra Club and its members care about both the natural and human environments, including promoting racial and social equity. As a grassroots organization, we believe that voting and related processes should be as accessible and convenient as possible for all individuals eligible.

Because in-person gatherings were discouraged during the pandemic state of emergency, the State Board of Elections in April 2020 authorized the temporary use of electronic signatures to make possible and facilitate signature-gathering for petitions to gain access to or place a question on the ballot.¹ HB 1109 puts the option to use electronic signatures into law.

Current law contains restrictions that make it difficult for a voter’s signature on a petition to be validated and counted, even when the voter’s intention is clear. If a voter does not remember exactly how their name appears on the voter registration list, their signature could be invalidated for merely failing to include a middle initial.

If the accompanying information on the petition confirms the identity of the individual, HB 1109 specifies that they can sign using a derivative of their given name (e.g., “Alex Smith” instead of “Alexandra Q. Smith”). And if there is some technical deficiency that would invalidate a voter’s signature, the bill provides a reasonable opportunity for the voter to correct the deficiency so their signature can be validated and counted.

Because the bill allows a voter to sign an election-related petition either in person or electronically and makes it more likely for a signature to be counted as the voter intended, we urge a favorable report on HB 1109.

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¹ See “[SBE Policy 2020-02: Extension of Certain Petition-Filing Deadlines](#)” and “[SBE Policy 2021-01: Extension of Temporary Electronic Petition Signature Acceptance](#)”.

Founded in 1892, the Sierra Club is America’s oldest and largest grassroots environmental organization. The Maryland Chapter has over 70,000 members and supporters, and the Sierra Club nationwide has over 800,000 members and nearly four million supporters.