



Maryland Chapter  
P.O. Box 278  
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**Committee:** Ways and Means  
**Testimony on:** SB 163 – Election Law – Ballots – Processing and Reporting Procedures  
**Position:** Favorable  
**Hearing Date:** March 22, 2022

The Maryland Chapter of the Sierra Club urges a favorable report on SB 163. The bill establishes uniform statewide procedures for the canvassing of and curing of errors in submission of absentee and provisional ballots and requires that all election results be reported by precinct.

The Sierra Club and its members care about both the natural and human environments, including ending racial and social injustice. As a grassroots organization, we believe that voting should be as accessible and convenient as possible for all eligible voters, regardless of whether they choose to vote in person at Early Voting Centers or on election day or by mail.

In Maryland some mail-in ballots get rejected because of relatively minor problems. According to the 2020 Election Administration and Voting Survey that the State Board of Elections sent to the U.S. Election Assistance Commission, 1511 Maryland voters' ballots were rejected in the November 2020 election because the voter's signature was not on the outer return envelope.

As many as 24 states have formal processes that allow voters to cure minor problems so their votes can be counted. While at least some local boards of elections in Maryland did alert voters and allow them to cure problems, there is not currently a uniform statewide standard or process. This bill would establish a uniform ballot curing process that will ensure all voters are treated fairly and equitably no matter where they live in the state.

The bill allows election officials to begin examining absentee ballot envelopes 8 days before early voting begins, which is early enough to identify problems such as a missing voter signature, notify the voter, and allow a reasonable time for the voter to correct the error so their ballot can be counted. Absentee ballots will be sent to voters well before the June 19 primary so voted absentee ballots will be received and safely stored in Board of Election offices well before the bill allows them to be examined. We do not believe that examining the envelopes and beginning processing will create any additional risk if the initial processing does not produce human-readable vote counts that could be inadvertently disclosed before election day.

A voter who is unsure whether their absentee ballot has been received and will be counted may go to the polling place on election day and cast a provisional ballot. This bill sets forth reasonable and workable rules to guide election officials in determining whether the absentee or provisional ballot should be counted. Reporting all election results by precinct will increase transparency and confidence in the election process.

We urge a favorable report on SB 163.

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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.