



Testimony in Support of SB 423, Registration and Voting at Polling Place
Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs
February 9, 2017

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of SB 423. Project Vote is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to realizing the promise of American democracy. Our mission is to build an electorate that accurately represents the diversity of America's citizenry, and to ensure that every eligible citizen can register to vote and cast a ballot that counts. Election Day registration, one of the most impactful election reforms a state can adopt, would allow Marylanders to register or update their registration on Election Day.

Fourteen states plus the District of Columbia have adopted this reform, including three that have successfully offered Election Day registration since the 1970s. Maryland's adoption of same-day registration during early voting is an important step forward for voting rights and election administration efficiency. However, registration is currently cut off five days before Election Day, when information about—and interest in—an election reaches its peak. Election Day registration is a proven method for increasing turnout. Research shows that “[a]lthough turnout inches higher as closing dates shorten, voter turnout still remains higher with the adoption of [Election Day] registration than with even very short closing dates.”¹

First-time voters, including young people and naturalized citizens, may not fully understand election procedures and deadlines. Further, every election, people inevitably go to polling places only to discover registration problems. Election Day registration helps voters while also reducing the number of provisional ballots, which require extra processing, both on and after Election Day.

Illinois recently adopted Election Day registration after offering same-day registration during early voting only. The communications director for the Chicago Board of Election Commissioners reported, “[w]e were extremely pleased with the overall successful launch between our training, documentation, our Election Day judges, and our voters being able to use Election Day Registration. EDR increased access to the franchise and participation, and we believe it greatly reduced the number of provisional ballots we might have had without

¹ Craig Leonard Brians & Bernard Grofman, Election Day Registration's Effect on U.S. Turnout, 82 Soc. Sci. Q. 170, 177 (2001), available at <http://www.socsci.uci.edu/~bgrofman/18%20Brians-Grofman-Election%20day%20registration's%20effect.pdf>.

it.”² The clerk of the largest county in Illinois similarly stated, “Election Day Registration is a key part of the voter registration reforms we have fought hard to get into law... [i]n our highly mobile society, we realize that there are times when people are just not registered when they go to vote.”³

Allowing more voters the opportunity to correct their address over longer period of time will increase the accuracy of the voter rolls. Moreover, there is no reason in our modern age to disenfranchise citizens simply because they have moved. Voters with low incomes, young voters, and voters of color are more likely to move frequently. Election Day registration helps these traditionally underrepresented communities by providing an opportunity to update addresses on Election Day and vote.

Maryland has shown a strong commitment to democratic participation. This bill will help ensure that all eligible Marylanders can make their voices heard in the political process. Project Vote encourages swift passage of this bill.

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² Marissa Liebling, What a Difference a Day Makes: The Evolution of Same Day Registration in Illinois, April 6, 2016, <http://www.projectvote.org/blog/the-evolution-of-same-day-registration-in-illinois>.

³ News from the Clerk: Election Day Registration available in all polling places Tuesday, March 15, 2016, <http://www.cookcountyclerk.com/newsroom/newsfromclerk/Pages/ElectionDayRegistrationavailableinallpollingplacesTuesday.aspx>.