



Testimony in Support of HB 732

Before the House Ways and Means Committee

February 22, 2011

By Susan Wichmann
Executive Director, Common Cause Maryland

Common Cause Maryland is a nonpartisan, non-profit, citizen lobby that works to improve the way Maryland's government operates. Common Cause has more than 400,000 members around the country and 36 state chapters. We have approximately 4,000 members in Maryland

Under Maryland's current law voters must register 3 weeks prior to the election. This system favors those who are highly motivated; interested in politics and plan in advance to be sure they are registered. Even those voters who try to register in advance do not always succeed. According to the Baltimore Sun in the past four years nearly 1 in 4 voters that believed they completed their voter registration with the Motor Vehicle Administration never made it onto the voter rolls. Maryland's current system disadvantages voters who tried to register and never made it onto the voter rolls. In addition it disadvantages voters who are less involved in politics, unfamiliar with the voter registration process, or recently changed residence.

HB 732 would not create election day voter registration it would however amend the Constitution so that the General Assembly could consider legislation that would permit election day registration.

Advantages of Election Day Registration

Election day registration (EDR) has been well-tested over the decades. Some states have used EDR since the 1970's, and today nine states and the District of Columbia have implemented EDR. The success of EDR is described by Demos, a nonpartisan policy organization, in their 2010 report:

Election day voter registration has the following benefits:

- **Well-tested:** Over 1 million Americans used EDR in the 2008 election.
- **Turnout:** In the 2008 election, EDR states had an average turnout 7 percentage points higher than states without it. Historically, EDR states have had turnout 10-12 percentage points higher than those without it.
- **Young voters:** Young people are typically less likely to vote, and EDR could change that. Research indicates that EDR could increase youth turnout in presidential elections by as much as 14 percentage points. In Iowa in 2008, people between the ages of 18 and 24 comprised almost 35% of the voters who used EDR.

- **Cost:** Many election officials in EDR states have described the incremental cost of EDR as minimal. In addition, EDR means fewer provisional ballots. Wisconsin's elections director said that his state's ability to avoid provisional balloting alone makes EDR worthwhile.
- **Integrity:** There has been no evidence that EDR has led to voter fraud. Minnesota's Secretary of State noted: "EDR is much more secure because you have the person right in front of you – not a postcard in the mail.... We have 35 years of experience with this."
- **Voters left off the rolls:** For voters who have recently moved or were mistakenly left off the voter rolls, EDR is a way to ensure they can re-register and cast a ballot.ⁱ

We urge the Committee to vote favorably on HB 732 as an important step towards improving voter participation in Maryland.

ⁱ Demos, "Voters Win With Same Day Registration," http://www.demos.org/pubs/voterswin_feb032010.pdf