



House Bill 79

Election Law - Early Voting Centers - Establishment and Hours

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**
WITH AMENDMENTS

To: Ways & Means Committee

Date: February 5, 2019

From: Kevin Kinnally

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS** HB 79, **WITH AMENDMENTS**. This bill would increase the required number of early voting centers in counties with at least 100,000 registered voters, while retaining a local option for smaller counties to add one additional location. MACo suggests that the local option be applied statewide.

HB 79 is a significant unfunded mandate on county governments. A “local option amendment” would relieve that mandate, and allow each jurisdiction to weigh these costs appropriately.

Chapter 288 of 2016 increased the required number of early voting centers in counties with more than 200,000 registered voters. Combined with the “absentee on demand” option and the passage of a Constitutional Amendment to allow same-day voter registration, Maryland voters now have a variety of options to exercise their voting privilege.

HB 79 expands the number of early voting centers by decreasing the threshold of registered voters that trigger a specific, higher number of minimum locations. For counties with fewer than 200,000 registered voters, it continues to allow them to determine locally whether to offer an additional early voting site.

Providing early voting locations entails substantial costs for equipment purchases/leases, equipment storage and transportation, staff compensation and training, and other overhead. These costs are nearly fully borne by the county governments.

MACo urges an amendment to HB 79 to make any further expansion of early voting centers a “local option,” having the expanded number of sites be a decision for each county governing body. This way, each jurisdiction could assess its demand, geography, and suitable facility locations, all with community input. They could then weigh the expanded sites as a local spending priority.

The current law contains contingent language as follows: “if the State Board, in collaboration with the local board, and the governing body of the county agree to establish an additional early voting center.”¹ This language seems to accomplish the objective of a local option appropriately, and should be attached to the full content of HB 79, rather than just the smaller counties.

MACo urges the Committee to issue a **FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS** report on HB 79 to retain a local option for each county.

¹ Section 10-301.1(b)(9) of the Election Law Article