



## **House Bill 1007**

### *Freedom to Vote Act*

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**  
**with AMENDMENTS**

Date: March 31, 2016

To: Education, Health, and Environmental  
Affairs Committee

From: Michael Sanderson

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS** HB 1007, **WITH AMENDMENTS**. The bill would create a nearly universal “opt out” voter registration process. As written, the legislation places a very substantial administrative and cost burden onto local Boards of Elections, whose functions are supported by county funding.

**HB 1007 is a major unfunded mandate on county governments. MACo urges amendments to ensure state resources be provided to support its substantial costs, and alleviate the mandate.**

Universal registration, or comparable opt-out voter enrollment programs, seek to extend voting franchise as widely as possible to eligible voters. MACo does not raise policy objections to these goals, as long as safeguards for voter eligibility remain intact and effective – county concerns are merely practical and cost-driven.

As a rule, MACo resists state policies that trigger costly or burdensome local implementation. These bills carry substantial costs to local Boards of Elections – driving needs for increased staff, mailings, equipment, storage, and transportation. Under state law, counties have no choice but to fund these costs – competing for limited local funds against education, public safety, roadway maintenance, and other essential public services.

If broadened voter registration is a top State priority, the State should provide the needed funding and resources for local election boards and staff. This includes two efforts: (1) exempting the resulting equipment and related costs from the current state policy of invoicing counties for half the related costs; and (2) providing suitable resources to offset the resulting staff and operations costs at local Boards of Elections and their administration.

This bill could place a costly mandate onto county-funded local Boards to carry out new State policy. Accordingly, MACo urges the Committee to issue a **FAVORABLE** report on HB 1007 **WITH AMENDMENTS** necessary to avoid a substantial unfunded mandate on local governments. MACo would be pleased to join local election administrators in working with the Committee to develop bill language that accomplishes this goal.