



House Bill 1008

Election Law - Early Voting Centers

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**
with AMENDMENTS

Date: March 3, 2016

To: Ways and Means Committee

From: Michael Sanderson

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS** HB 1008, **WITH AMENDMENTS**. The bill would expand the number of early voting locations in the state's larger counties, and retain a local option for smaller counties to add a second location. MACo suggests that the local option be applied to the full bill.

For years, Maryland's effort to offer and promote early voting has extended convenience to voters. Combined with the "absentee on demand" option, Maryland voters now have a variety of options to exercise their voting privilege.

HB 1008 expands the number of early voting centers, by creating a two-tiered law. For larger counties, it prescribes a specific number of minimum locations (higher than the current law). For the smaller counties (by population), it continues to allow them to select whether to offer early voting at one or two locations.

Providing early voting locations entails substantial costs for equipment purchases/leases, its 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 1008 to make the full bill 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 site 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 1008, rather than to just the smaller counties.

MACo urges the Committee to issue a **FAVORABLE** report on HB 1008 **WITH AMENDMENTS** to retain a local option for each county.

¹ Section 10-301.1(a)(6) of the Election Law Article