As a result of the early voting veto override this past January, Maryland must implement early voting for the 2006 election cycle. Initially under the law, local election boards were directed to choose the most geographically and central locations. Instead, under this bill, the General Assembly unilaterally selected the early voting polling locations. During the Senate floor debate, it was revealed that certain local election administrators and advocacy groups had never been consulted on the placement of these early voting locations. Local election board members and administrators are the most knowledgeable about these decisions and I am dismayed that they were not able to voice their opinions and be engaged in the selection process for early voting locations in their respective jurisdictions.

I am especially disturbed that the Conference Committee appointed by the presiding officers did not include any members from the Republican Caucus. Excluding the minority party from participating in decisions concerning the placement of early voting polling places highlights the highly partisan approach of the General Assembly's election law manipulations this session. As a result, these locations were placed in areas heavily populated by Democrats rather than in ones more convenient or centrally located to all residents.

Next, this bill mandates new restrictions for purging names from the voter registration rolls. The 2005 report of the Commission on Federal Election Reform, chaired by U.S. President James Carter and former U.S. Secretary of State James A. Baker, recommends that states focus efforts on improving voter registration database management, including the requirement that states take proactive roles to register voters and cleanse voter rolls. Our election administrators need authority and flexibility to cleanse the voter registration lists and ensure that our Statewide voter registration database is in full operation in time for the upcoming elections. This bill creates artificial restrictions on this process and greatly hinders efforts by our local election administrators to have a clean and accurate voter registration list. If it is determined a registered voter has relocated, is deceased or created a fraudulent registration, that name should be removed from the voter registration database immediately. So long as local election administrators can verify ineligibility before removing a voter's name, there should not be a time–prescribed legal impediment to do so; otherwise we risk increasing the potential for voter fraud. In contrast to the restrictions created by this bill, the Carter–Baker report suggested that it is more efficient to resolve voter registration issues prior to the election instead of being caught in post election court challenges over voter eligibility that delay election results and allow judges to be the final arbitrator of who won.

I believe that the Maryland General Assembly misplaced its priorities on election issues during the 2006 session and should have focused efforts on voting system security instead of this bill. In December 2005, the California Secretary of State revealed that the memory card source code contained in our Diebold AccuVote–TS machines has never been tested. This Administration and the General Assembly had been assured previously by the State Administrator that these voting machines and its source code had been fully tested. In fact, the risk assessment study conducted by Science Applications International Corporation (SAIC) upon which we relied to assure the public that we have a reliable system was premised upon the false assumption that federal testing had certified this source code. The recent California studies