

Day. On that day, we appoint representatives of the political parties as election judges to conduct the balloting process at the polls. We also allow representatives of political parties, candidates and advocacy groups to appoint poll watchers and challengers to observe the conduct of the election. We only allow absentee ballots to be used by those with valid reasons that would prohibit their attendance at the polls. All of these factors create a delicate balance between protecting voter's rights while recognizing the State's obligation to protect against voter fraud.

House Bill 622 upsets this delicate balance without providing additional safeguards to protect against voter fraud. In fact, it is an invitation for greater voter fraud in the state. Those states that have "no-excuse" absentee voting generally have more stringent requirements for voter identification in the absentee ballot process, including that the ballot be notarized or signed by two witnesses who are subject to criminal penalties for false impersonation. One state includes provisions that any absentee ballot from a resident of a nursing home must be witnessed by two members of the "Nursing Home Absentee Voting Board." Moreover, there is a lack of consensus among the State's election officials about "no-excuse" absentee voting in Maryland. Even though members of the State Board of Elections expressed opposition to House Bill 622 at their February 2005 board meeting, the State Administrator testified in favor of the bill before the General Assembly. Specifically, members of the State Board maintain that absentee voting is the least secure method of voting, and accordingly, believe it should be subjected to further study.

While I believe that "no-excuse" absentee voting may be an appropriate election technique in Maryland, it should only be implemented after a thorough study and with full support of Maryland's election leaders. Please be assured that the Administration is committed to instilling public confidence in elections and ensuring that all Marylanders have the opportunity to cast a ballot and have their ballot counted. To this end, I will appoint a commission to examine and evaluate the election law bills passed this session and make recommendations concerning our State's election process. I am confident such a commission will develop policies and procedures assuring that fair and accurate elections take place within the State.

For the above stated reasons, I have vetoed House Bill 622.

Very truly yours,
Robert L. Ehrlich, Jr.
Governor

House Bill No. 622

AN ACT concerning

Elections - Absentee Voting on Demand

FOR the purpose of eliminating the circumstances that are required to exist for a voter to qualify for voting by absentee ballot; altering the methods for receiving and submitting an application for an absentee ballot; and generally relating to voting by absentee ballot.

BY repealing and reenacting, with amendments,