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**Testimony for the House Ways and Means Committee
February 16, 2018**

HB 829 Local Government - Municipal Elections - No-Excuse Absentee Voting

FAVORABLE

The ACLU of Maryland supports HB 829, which would prevent a municipality from requiring a voter to provide a reason as to why he or she wishes to vote by absentee ballot.

The vote is the defining act of citizenship. As a democracy, we should encourage all eligible voters to avail themselves of the franchise. And in so doing, we should make the act of voting itself as available as possible to all eligible voters. Allowing individuals to vote by absentee ballot without having to provide a reason would further enable Marylanders to take advantage of their right to vote.

Any voter should be allowed to vote absentee for any reason or for no reason at all. The current system, which requires absentee ballot seekers to provide the government with personal information about their livelihoods—from medical conditions to religious practices to household circumstances—is unreasonable and infringes on Marylanders' privacy.

Improvements to voter registration access is particularly important in Maryland—in 2016, voter turnout was only 66 percent, which means 1.4 million eligible voters did not participate in the 2016 elections. This was the lowest turnout the state had seen since 1992.¹

Finally, the proposal under HB 829 is a cost-effective way to potentially increase voter turnout. As the fiscal and policy note to the bill states, the measure would not affect local government finances.

For these reasons, the ACLU of Maryland urges a favorable report on HB 829.

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¹ NBC Washington—First Read – DMV. Maryland Voter Turnout Ended Up Lower Than Projected. Bryan White. Nov. 10, 2016.