

From: **Cassandra Okwumabua** <cassandra.d.okwumabua@gmail.com>

Date: Sun, Nov 19, 2023 at 7:27 PM

Subject: Calvert County Board of Election Proposed Plan

To: <info@sbe.maryland.gov>

CC: MichaelGSummers2014@gmail.com <MichaelGSummers2014@gmail.com>, Katherine Berry <katherine.berry@maryland.gov>

Good morning, State Board of Elections,

I am writing this email as a personal citizen who is objecting to the approval of the Calvert County Board of Elections' proposed Polling Places and Boundaries changes. I am also requesting that you view the attached presentation that was given as an update to the Calvert County Commissioners by our BOE staff, which I attended. The discussion during this presentation did not convey recommendations being made to the Commissioners, but instead, the views of the BOE staff and why specific Polling place closures should be implemented.

As a citizen, I strongly disagree with this plan, because it will disenfranchise citizens from the ability to vote in person, at existing and familiar polling places for the upcoming 2024 election. During a Presidential election based on data shown on the state website, citizens prefer voting in person. Making these proposed changes needs more in-depth review and data for trending purposes before this plan is approved by our State BOE. I urge you to delay these changes for these reasons until after our 2024 election.

Free and Fair elections are the hallmark of our democratic process.

Sincerely,

Cassandra Okwumabua
(Pronounced O-cum-ma-bua)

https://calvertcounty.granicus.com/player/clip/1753?meta_id=130359

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November 15, 2023

Maryland State Board of Elections
151 West Street, Suite 200
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Dear Maryland State Board of Elections Members:

We are writing to express our deep concern regarding the proposed plan to combine/change polling places and boundaries in Calvert County before the 2024 election. As it seems evident that a decision will be made to change and close existing polling locations before the 2024 election, we think this decision should be made with great care, transparency, and consideration for the impact these changes will have on the citizens of Calvert County.

We believe there are numerous problems with the Calvert Board of Election's proposal and would like to outline what we believe are two major problems with the proposal.

At the public hearings held by the Board of Elections, the Board Administrator presented a PowerPoint advocating the proposed changes. Data listed in these presentations provided only voter statistics from gubernatorial elections and *DID NOT* incorporate any statistics from presidential elections. Additionally, statistics from the 2020 and 2022 elections may be skewed, as these data were obtained during the COVID-19 pandemic. As these proposed changes and closures would be implemented based on data from only one cycle of gubernatorial elections during the COVID-19 pandemic and without taking into account the unique circumstances and voter turnout associated with presidential elections, we have serious questions about fairness and accessibility. Please keep in mind that presidential elections historically draw a much larger and more diverse voter turnout than gubernatorial elections. Therefore, it is essential to consider the broader context and incorporate all data when making a final decision about polling location changes and closures. Failure to do so may disenfranchise voters who rely on the familiarity of their specific polling locations where they have voted for many years. While we understand there has been an increase in the number of mail-in ballots and in early voting, this should not be the only thing driving these proposed changes. We have also been told by some Calvert Board of Elections members that some of our current polling locations are difficult for some voters to access. How many people have had problems? Our local Board of Elections does not have data on complaints it has received on this issue. Also, polling

locations in Calvert County are in public schools and public buildings that are ADA-accessible. If people are having problems accessing the polls in ADA-complaint buildings, we have some bigger problems.

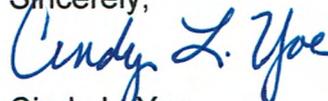
Additionally, what is the rush? No major voter problems were evident during the 2022 election, so why the need for these changes so close to the 2024 election? There does not seem to be any reason that such changes need to be made, particularly made so quickly. Seems we have a solution looking for a problem. Should these proposed changes be implemented, there will be only six months before the May 2024 primary election in which to familiarize the public with such changes. That is not enough time. The lack of proper and timely notification regarding these proposed changes is deeply concerning. There is a great probability that the 2024 presidential election will bring a lot of voters to the polls. Even though the Calvert County Board of Elections stated that it will send new voter registration cards to all citizens affected and will work to "get the word out," we believe making such changes six months before an election is impractical. Face it, people don't pay attention. Adding these last-minute changes to polling locations may confuse a lot of voters and ultimately result in their becoming frustrated and not voting at all. Transparency and open communications are fundamental to the integrity of our electoral process. Voters of Calvert deserve to be informed *well in advance* of changing and consolidating polling places, allowing them to plan accordingly and to exercise their right to vote without unnecessary barriers.

We urge the Maryland State Board of Elections to reject any change of polling place and boundary at this time. If, after the 2024 presidential election, the Board of Elections would like to propose making changes to existing polling locations and boundaries, then and only then would a thorough review of these decisions be justified, ensuring the input of all stakeholders in this process. It is crucial to engage the entire community in gathering feedback and making data-driven decisions that prioritize equitable access to the polls.

Our democracy thrives when all eligible voters have fair and equal access to the voting process. We call on you to address these concerns and respectfully request that you vote down the proposed changes to voting locations that are being submitted to you by the Calvert County Board of Elections and ensure that the citizens of Calvert County can continue to exercise their right to vote with confidence and in the integrity of the process.

Thank you for your attention to this matter, and I look forward to hearing about specific actions to these concerns. Please call me at (240) 441-6029 if you have questions or would like to address our concerns.

Sincerely,



Cindy L. Yoe
Chair



CALVERT COUNTY BOARD OF ELECTIONS

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November 27, 2023

Katherine Berry
Deputy Administrator
State Board of Elections
151 West Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

Subject: Response to Calvert County Democrats Letter of Opposition, dated November 15, 2023

Dear Ms. Berry,

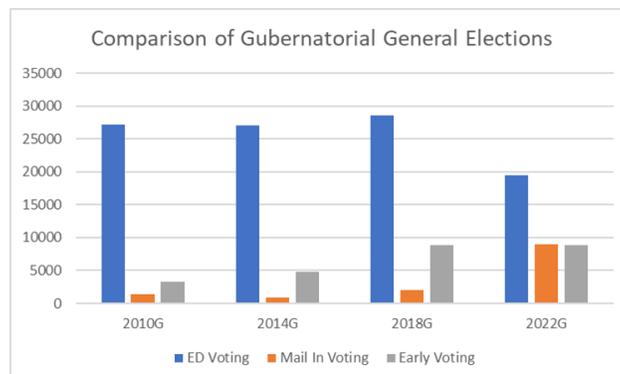
I am writing in response to the letter sent by the Calvert County Democrats.

The Calvert County Democrats claim there are two major issues with the polling place plan that Calvert County Election Board has submitted.

The first is that data is only listed from gubernatorial elections.

We used the most recently completed election which was the 2022 gubernatorial for demonstration purposes. We agree with their assertion that the 2020 presidential election voting options skewed towards the vote by mail option due to the Covid-19 pandemic. In 2022, a “typical” election was held with polling places open with additional voting opportunities such as early voting and mail in ballots available.

In order to show data trends, we used the graph below showing gubernatorial general elections in Calvert County to convey several points. Since presidential and gubernatorial can have widely varying



turnouts and the 2020 election was biased towards voting by mail, we decided to use the gubernatorial elections.

Historically, both Maryland and Calvert County voters primarily vote on Election Day. The graph shows that voting in person on Election Day remains a popular option. It also shows the steady increase of early voting in Calvert County from 2010 to 2018 and that mail in voting remained a small percentage of the total turnout until the 2020 election. In 2022, as Covid-19 was ending, voters returned to voting in-person as their primary option. According to the State Board of Elections 2022 General Election report that many of the those who voted by mail for the first time in 2020 continued to vote this way in 2022. In Calvert County, there are over 6,800 voters on the permanent mail in ballot list.

The US Election Assistance Commission gathers data on voting after each election on a national basis. According to the Election Assistance Commission report for the 2022 election, that “although the use of mail voting decreased in 2022 compared to the 2020 general election, mail voting rates remained higher than pre-pandemic levels, at 31.9% of voters participating in the 2022 election who cast their ballots by mail” and that the data collected from the last three election cycles shows that Covid-19 had a lasting effect on how voters cast their general election ballots.

Additionally, there is concern about the length of time to notify voters of changes to their precinct. We feel that six months is a proper timeframe to notify voters that there are changes to the polling places. Longer outreach campaigns with similar themes can lead to message fatigue. Paradoxically, notifying voters too early could lead to voters not remembering that their polling place has changed.

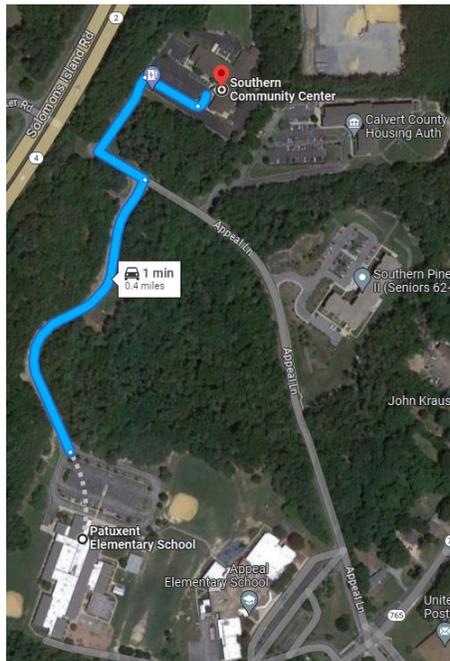
The timeframe allows for notification to voters via their updated voter notification cards followed by a sustained outreach campaign. The outreach campaign will take place before both the primary and the general elections. One suggestion during the public comment period is to highlight the polling place in color on the front of the sample ballot, which will be requested in the quotes for the specimen ballots. We will also work with our local organizations to contact communities and others to disseminate this information. We feel that the polling place changes we are requesting is for the benefit of the voters. For example, changing Northern Middle School to Northern High School. These schools are next to each other and the high school has more parking and is more easily accessible with the voting room located at the entrance.



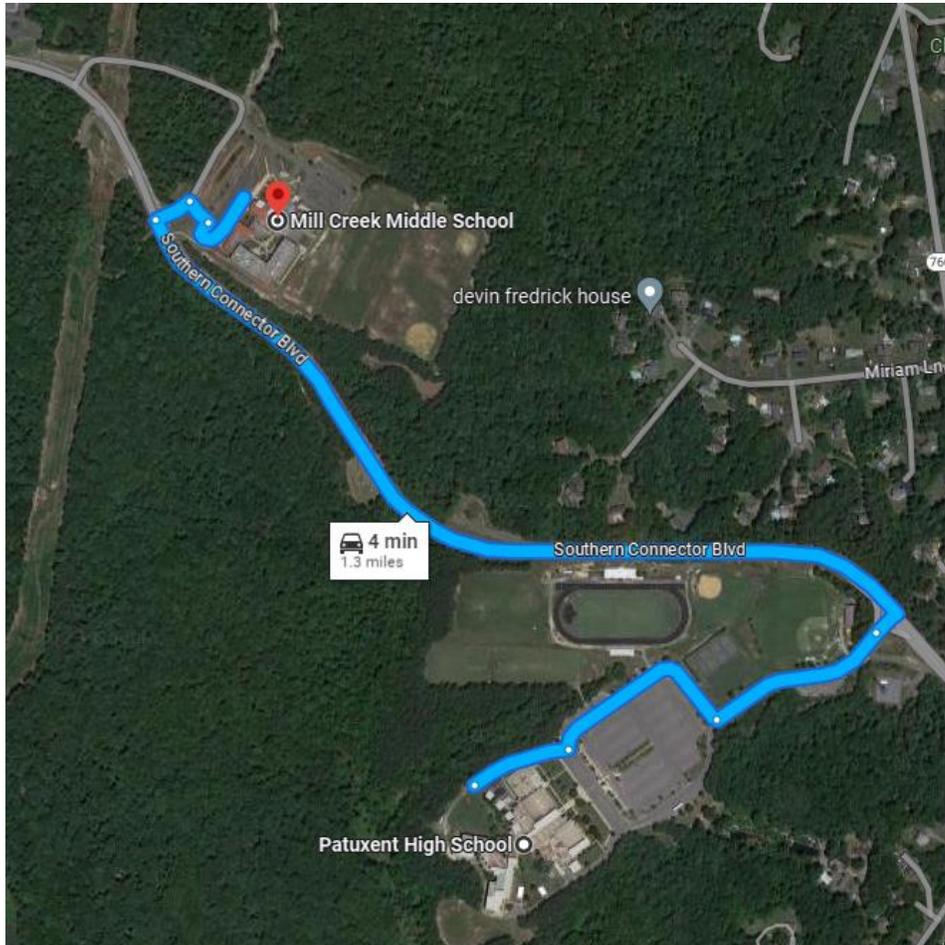
Our northern early vote site was a trailer located at the Fairview Library in 2022. We also used it as a polling place on Election Day for 03-07 precinct. For 2024, we found a better location for the trailer and so changed its location to Dunkirk. This necessitated a change in the polling location for 03-07 to Northern High School as well, since it was the closest polling place.



In the southern end we requested changing Patuxent Elementary School to Southern Community Center, since the community center is directly on the bus route and has more parking available. Patuxent Elementary School is located across the street from the community center.



We also want to change Mill Creek Middle School to Patuxent High School as it has a larger voting room and ample parking. Additionally, this plan places the polling places within the precinct boundaries.



The reason the Election Board are combining two polling places into one larger building is that these buildings can better serve our voters and handle the increased number of voters, especially since there has been an increase in voting by mail. I will be happy to answer any questions.

Sincerely,

Gail L. Hatfield
Elections Administrator