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**Senate Bill 293: Elections – Permanent Absentee Ballot List
Testimony of Adam Fogel, FairVote Right to Vote Director
Maryland Senate Education, Health and Environment Committee
February 25, 2010**

Madam Chair, members of the Senate Education, Health and Environment Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in strong support of Senate Bill 293. This bill will ensure that the most vulnerable among us have the chance to cast a ballot in every election. Senior citizens in nursing homes, the disabled community and others who cannot make it to the polls on Election Day should have the comfort and convenience of voting without the burden of submitting an absentee ballot request before every single election. Establishing a permanent absentee voter list would expand access to the polls by eliminating some of the red tape and bureaucracy involved in requesting an absentee ballot.

Maryland already has very good laws regarding absentee voting, but this bill would strengthen our existing policy. Maryland voters may request an absentee ballot with no excuse, which is the national norm. However, even with this no-excuse policy, Maryland voters must continually request an absentee ballot. Enacting the permanent absentee policy would build on current Maryland law in a positive way.

Establishing a permanent absentee voter list would not only decrease the burden placed on voters, but also the strain experienced by local election officials as Election Day approaches. While local election offices continue to manually input voter registration forms and prepare for Election Day itself, they are also forced to needlessly field thousands of absentee ballot request forms because of the current policy. Passing SB 293 represents one seemingly small, yet important way for the State Legislature to help reduce the burden of underfunded, understaffed and overworked election officials in this state.

Aside from Maryland's elderly and disabled communities, other groups of Marylanders would benefit from this policy. Members of our armed forces serving overseas or based in other states should be able to vote in their home state without requesting an absentee ballot each year. Maryland college students who go to schools in other states should also be able to vote back in their home districts, if they so choose, without requesting an absentee ballot every single year. Marylanders who travel and work overseas or will not be in their home district for Election Day should also have the opportunity to cast a ballot in every election without having to request an absentee ballot.

For these reasons, I strongly urge this committee to favorably report SB 293. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.