



PROTECTING THE VOTE FOR ALL AMERICANS

**Fair Elections Center Testimony in Support of SB 1097**  
**Virginia Senate Privileges and Elections Committee**  
**Tuesday, January 19, 2021**

Fair Elections Center supports SB 1097 because this bill would make absentee voting more accessible and make it easier for voters to cast a ballot that counts.

Fair Elections Center is a national, nonpartisan voting rights and election reform organization which works to remove barriers to registration and voting for traditionally underrepresented constituencies. Formed in 2017 to continue the work of the Fair Elections Legal Network, the Center works to improve election administration through legislative, legal and administrative reform, to protect access to the ballot through litigation, and to provide election law expertise, voter information and technical assistance to voter mobilization organizations. In 2020, among other work, Fair Elections Center brought litigation in a number of states to protect the right to vote by mail in light of the Covid-19 pandemic.

**SB 1097.** SB 1097 would remove the requirement to include a witness signature with the voted absentee ballot. The witness requirement is a barrier to voting and is unnecessary because absentee voting is secured in multiple, more effective ways. For example, Virginians supply personal identification information when registering to vote and when identifying themselves to vote absentee. The requirement is harmful to the many Virginians with disabilities, many of whom have significant mobility impairments. For that reason, it is difficult for many qualified voters to locate and coordinate a witness. Particularly at a time when many at-risk voters are continuing to self-isolate due to the pandemic, the witness requirement poses an unnecessary risk to both health and voting rights without any added benefit.

Fair Elections Center urges you to move this bill forward. If you have any questions or need further information, please contact Michelle Kanter Cohen, Senior Counsel, Fair Elections Center, (202) 331-0114, [mkantercohen@fairelectionscenter.org](mailto:mkantercohen@fairelectionscenter.org).