



Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council

CREATING CHANGE • IMPROVING LIVES

Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
SB 495: Election Law - Petitions and Ballot Questions - Plain Language Requirement
February 21, 2024
Position: Support

The Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council (Council) is an independent public policy organization that creates change to make it possible for people with developmental disabilities to live the lives they want with the support they need. Our vision is that people with and without disabilities in Maryland live, learn, work, and play together.

WHAT does this legislation do?

- SB 495 makes changes to the way that petitions for new ballot questions and questions on a ballot are written. It requires that they are written in plain language.
- Plain language is a way of writing so that all people can understand information the first time they read it.

WHY is this legislation important?

- **Writing ballot petitions and questions in plain language benefits everyone.** Currently, many ballot questions can be confusing for people with and without disabilities to understand. Using plain language makes it easier for all voters, including people with disabilities, to understand what they are being asked to consider.
- **This bill makes voting more accessible for people with disabilities.** Voting is a fundamental right for Marylanders with developmental disabilities, but they face barriers. Research shows that 20% of voters with disabilities face difficulties with voting, compared to 6% of voters without disabilities¹. But these difficulties can be eliminated. Research also shows that with more accessible voting options available, more people with disabilities vote². Creating more accessible voting practices, such as incorporating plain language, allows more people with disabilities to vote.

Incorporating plain language into ballot petitions and questions allows all Marylanders to better participate in the electoral process. This makes voting more accessible for everyone, including people with developmental disabilities. **For that reason, the Council supports SB 495.**

Contact: Chris Rogers, Director of Engagement, CRogers@md-council.org

¹ https://www.eac.gov/sites/default/files/2023-07/EAC_2023_Rutgers_Report_FINAL.pdf

² https://smlr.rutgers.edu/sites/default/files/Documents/Centers/Program_Disability_Research/FactSheet_Disability_Voter_Turnout_2020.pdf