

Testimony of Edward Fischman - in Support of HB 257
(Chair – Montgomery County chapter of Our Revolution Maryland)

Chair Atterbeary, Vice-Chair Wilkins, and the Members of the Ways and Means Committee:

I offer this testimony in support of the bill, HB 257, on behalf of Our Revolution Maryland, which has been advocating for various reforms to our election and appointment rules to democratize rules which too often work to entrench and reinforce the influence of those in positions of power. In connection with this interest, members of our organization have stood for election or appointment to the county Democratic Central Committees, as well as the General Assembly, in hopes of advancing some important reforms.

Many of our members support open primaries. Some are unaffiliated. Others are Green Party members. A handful may be members of yet another party. I understand them, because I was similarly aligned when I first registered as a teenager in New York.

I first registered in New York as an unaffiliated voter, after supporting a former Republican independent for President. I soon found it frustrating that I could not vote in the Democratic primary, even though I consistently favored Democratic candidates, and even worked on their behalf. In Maryland, I registered as a Democrat, and I have labored to convince other progressive but unaffiliated voters to support Democratic candidates and even to switch their affiliation to vote in primaries.

It is not an easy ask. Few unaffiliated or third-party voters have any inclination to make a change, even if you note that it can be a very temporary change. However, for those who do want to switch affiliation, the rules should make that as easy as possible.

I know many new registrants and new citizens do not know where they fit in, and they are often encouraged to register unaffiliated until they do figure that out. We should make it possible for them to change when they go to vote in early voting.

The reform advocated in HB 257 would make an important change to the current law which requires voters to have both real forethought and to go out of their way to change their affiliation. Allowing them to make the change when they go to vote in early voting is the kind of common-sense reform that is too often resisted for no good reason.

Personally, I have come to see the wisdom of maintaining closed primaries. It does make sense to have only those people who are willing to identify as members to choose the party's nominees. However, we should not try to discourage voters from changing their party identification and participating in primaries.

We have sorted ourselves so geographically in the United States and especially in Maryland that the primaries are often where our representatives are really chosen. We should make it as easy as possible for voters to decide to engage and participate in that process.

On my own behalf, and on behalf of thousands of Our Revolution members in Maryland, I urge the committee to issue a favorable report on HB257.