

Hi, my name is Jason Makstein. I run the local news blog “Moderately MOCO” but I am testifying on behalf of myself strongly in support of HB257.

Right now in Maryland there is a penalty for registering to vote. If already registered, to change parties you must do so 21 days before the election. If not registered, you can join a party on Election Day. This creates a lot of confusion and difficulties for independents to have a say in our elections.

This bill will bring these two closer in line by allowing change in party affiliation at an early voting center during a primary election. I would like to see it be day of just like those who are not yet registered but this is a huge improvement over the current law.

I have worked to register independents to vote in the Montgomery County primary (our de facto election for local races) and most are not even aware of this rule. I have heard countless cases of independents trying to vote in the Democratic primary and not being able to because they are registered independents and didn't realize that doesn't allow them to vote for the races they wanted to.

Based on the data from November 3, 2020, Maryland had 766,788 registered unaffiliated voters. This represented 18.65% of all registered voters. This is who you would be giving more say to by bills like this to make it easier to vote.

Based on data from November 2022, In Montgomery County there were 162,053 active registered unaffiliated voters. This represented 23.6% of all active registered voters.

Meanwhile, as I'm sure most of you are aware, in most of our counties as well as at the state level, our primary races are much closer than the general election. Spending and campaigning is largely focused on the primaries including many millions in public funds – and rightfully so. Unaffiliated voters should have as much chance to make the decision to affiliate and participate in our primary elections as someone who is not yet registered.

In many cases these are younger people or those new to the state and/or country because registration can be done as part of the DMV process and often people don't want to pick a party at that time.

This change would allow more people to participate in our publicly funded primary elections and avoid confusion and should be passed. Please support this bill.

Thank you, Jason Makstein