

February 27, 2024

Testimony on HB 1342
Elections – Ballot Questions – Publication of Proposed Laws and Plain Language
Summary
Ways and Means

Position: Favorable

Common Cause Maryland is in favor of HB 1342. The bill would require the State and local boards of elections to post in a manner widely accessible to the public the complete text of certain proposed ballot questions for at least 65 days before the General Election, as well as ensure that ballot measures are written in a way that is easy for the average voter to understand.

The public can only benefit from increased access and transparency within our legislative process, especially when it comes to the decisions that could have an effect on them and their communities. And for those who choose to vote in person, the public posting of ballot questions gives voters another opportunity to familiarize themselves with the issues before they step to the ballot box on Election Day.

Ensuring that ballot measures are written in plain, easily understandable language will also go a long way towards helping voters feel confident as they step into the ballot box. We know that ballot measures – which often include highly technical language - are a big problem in elections. Many voters are left unsure of how they actually voted on a question, or they may avoid voting on certain questions altogether because they are just can't be sure of what they are being asked. It is important that voters are conscious of the decisions they are making. It is also important that voters don't feel left out of policymaking by intimidating ballot language.

A plain language requirement is not about questioning the intelligence of Marylander voters. The intent of the bill is to acknowledge the realities of the educational make up of our state and country, and take the necessary steps to make voting on ballot measures more accessible for everyone. Increased access and transparency around ballot questions will lead to a more informed electorate, and for that reason we request a favorable report on HB 1342.