



# Maryland Association of Election Officials

## Representing the Local Election Boards of the State of Maryland

February 6, 2024

Delegate Vanessa Atterbeary, Chair  
Maryland House Ways and Means Committee  
Room 131, House Office Building  
Annapolis, MD 21401-1991

### **HB257 - Information**

Dear Chair Atterbeary, Vice Chair Wilkins and Committee Members:

My name is John Michael Gudger, chair of the Maryland Association of Election Officials (MAEO) Legislative Committee. While we recognize the intent of House Bill 257 to enhance democratic participation, we would like to address several concerns regarding its implementation and potential impact on the election process in Maryland.

#### **1. Increase in Provisional Ballots:**

House Bill 257 will likely lead to a significant increase in the number of provisional ballots cast during primary elections. Processing provisional ballots is labor-intensive and requires additional resources and time for verification and counting. This surge could strain our current capacities, potentially leading to delays in election results and increased costs.

#### **2. Confusion between 3rd Party and Unaffiliated Voters:**

The bill may also cause confusion among voters not in the main two political parties, particularly in distinguishing between 'Independent' and 'Unaffiliated' status. Voters often use these terms interchangeably, though they have distinct meanings in the context of Maryland's election laws, as 'Independent' means "Member of the Independence Party." This confusion could lead to challenges for judges at polling places during the Primary.

#### **3. Gaming the System:**

Permitting unaffiliated voters to align with a political party at early voting centers poses the risk of individuals affiliating merely to sway the results of a party's primary, not due to a true allegiance to that party. It is probable that such voters would revert to Unaffiliated status post-election to retain the flexibility to participate in either party's primary in future elections. This expected pattern of frequent affiliation changes would significantly increase the workload for our staff. Indeed, this arrangement could incentivize all voters to register as Unaffiliated, thus enabling them to selectively participate in the primary of their choice each election cycle.

#### **4. Impact on Ballot and Supply Orders:**

Typically, in primary elections, our ballot and supply orders do not account for a significant number of Unaffiliated (UNA) voters, except when there is a Board of Education contest. Implementing this bill could substantially alter our ordering processes, as we would need to anticipate a higher demand for ballots from newly affiliated voters. This change could lead to challenges in accurately predicting the number of ballots needed and might result in either shortages or excess, both of which have financial and logistical implications.

In conclusion, while we support efforts to increase voter participation and engagement, it is crucial to consider the practical implications of House Bill 257 on the administration of elections in Maryland. We recommend a thorough assessment of the potential impacts, including the development of strategies to address these concerns effectively. It is essential to ensure that any changes to election laws enhance the electoral process without compromising its integrity, efficiency, and the trust of Maryland voters.

Thank you for considering our perspective on this important matter.

Sincerely,

John Michael Gudger  
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Chair, MAEO Legislative Committee