



Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council

CREATING CHANGE • IMPROVING LIVES

House Ways and Means Committee

HB 1343: Elections – Ballot Questions – Publication of Proposed Laws and Plain Language Summary

February 27, 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?

- HB1343 requires that proposed changes that Marylanders will vote on, the changes need to be written and posted for the public to review for 65 days before a general election. This includes changes to the state constitution or local charters (amendments) or when there is a change created by the general assembly or local government that will go to a public vote (enactment).
- The bill also requires that the changes include a summary on the ballot that is written in “plain, easily understandable language” (page 3, line 14-15). Plain language is the technical term for a way of writing so that all people can understand information the first time they read it.

WHY is this legislation important?

- **Posting information ahead of time and writing ballot summaries in plain language benefits everyone.** Currently, many ballot questions can be confusing for people with and without disabilities to understand. Posting changes 65 days ahead of elections and using plain language summaries, 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.

When voting is more accessible, everyone benefits. By creating more accessible voting practices, such as plain language summaries and making information available ahead of time, this bill allows more people with disabilities to be able to vote. **For that reason, the Council supports HB 1343.**

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

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