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Testimony from:
Dr. Jonathan Madison, Governance Fellow, R Street Institute

Testimony in Support of MD HB 890, “An Act concerning Election Law – Primary Elections – Change of Political Party Affiliation”

February 18th, 2025

Maryland House Ways and Means Committee

Chairwoman Atterbeary and members of the committee,

My name is Dr. Jonathan Madison, and I am a Governance Fellow at the R Street Institute, a nonprofit, nonpartisan public policy research organization. Our mission is to engage in policy analysis and outreach to promote free markets and limited, effective government in many areas, including election administration. This is why we have an interest in House Bill 890.

HB 890 makes primaries more accessible by allowing Maryland voters to register with the party of their choice and cast a ballot on election day for political primaries. This legislation would significantly reduce the barriers to voting in primaries and thus encourage greater participation in this important stage of the electoral process.¹

Currently in Maryland, only unregistered voters are permitted to select their party affiliation during primary elections. HB 890 sanctions the right of a registered voter to alter their party affiliation at a voting location during a political primary election, and vote in that very same primary.

This will create a system that enables more voters to participate strengthens legitimacy and fosters greater trust and representation in election outcomes. Higher participation also requires candidates to appeal to a broader range of voters, ensuring that those who advance to the general election are more representative of the electorate as a whole. When candidates must engage with a wider audience, they are incentivized to build broader coalitions and address the concerns of a more diverse voter base. This leads to a stronger and more competitive general election.²

¹ Joshua Ferrer, Michael Thorning, and J. D. Rackey, “The Effect of Open Primaries on Turnout and Representation” Bipartisan Policy Center, October 2024, <https://bipartisanpolicy.org/report/the-effect-of-open-primaries-on-turnout-and-representation/>.

² Sarah Anderson, Daniel Butler, and Laurel Harbridge-Yong, “The Electoral Challenge of Balancing Primary and General Electorates”, Institute for Policy Research - Northwestern University, February 10, 2023, <https://www.ipr.northwestern.edu/our-work/working-papers/2023/wp-23-07.html>.



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HB 890 constitutes a meaningful improvement to Maryland's primary elections by enabling greater participation and strengthening the candidates who emerge from it. For these reasons, we encourage your support of HB 890.

Thank you,

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