



## **TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE**

### **HB 890—Election Law-- Primary Elections - Change of Political Party Affiliation**

**POSITION: Support**

**BY: Linda Kohn, President**

**DATE: February 18, 2025**

The League of Women Voters supports HB 890 to permit voters to appear in-person at a primary election site to change their party affiliation and then cast their ballot for the candidate(s) in the voter's new party affiliation. An October 2024 report from the Bipartisan Policy Center found that the rules for primary elections influence who votes and primarily affect unaffiliated voters.<sup>1</sup>

Voter turnout for primary elections in Maryland is dismal. In the 2024 primary election, statewide turnout among eligible voters was just over 27% overall, meaning that almost three-quarters of voters stayed home. Data from the State Board of Elections indicate that almost 22% of eligible voters in 2024 were unaffiliated—almost one million voters—and turnout among them is particularly low. These voters can vote in the primary for non-partisan offices only, such as the Board of Education, but are not allowed to vote for other offices. So, while primary turnout was 29% among Republicans and 31% among Democrats, it was just 8% among unaffiliated voters because half of them were not eligible to vote at all in the primary because there were no non-partisan offices for them to vote. Among those who were eligible to vote in the 2024 primary, the greatest number were in Montgomery County with 168,540 such voters, but only about 6% of them turned out to vote. Second was Anne Arundel at 60,210 unaffiliated voters and, again, only 6% turnout. In Howard County, there were 38,466 unaffiliated voters with a turnout of about 11%.

The League believes it is essential that election systems produce representation that reflects community sentiment and helps increase voter participation. If one in five voters are limited in casting ballots in primary elections, the system is not representative. The League supports more open primary elections, including through party primary elections in which unaffiliated voters as well as party members would be permitted to vote to choose the nominees.

**We strongly support HB 890 and encourage a favorable report.**

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<sup>1</sup> J. Ferrer, M. Thorning, J.D. Rackey, *The Effect of Open Primaries on Turnout and Representation*, Bipartisan Policy Center, October 2024. [www.bipartisanpolicy.org](http://www.bipartisanpolicy.org)