



Maryland Association of Election Officials

Representing the Local Election Boards of the State of Maryland

February 4, 2026

Delegate Melissa Wells, Chair
Maryland House Government, Labor, and Elections Committee
145 Lowe House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401-1991

HB156 - Information

Chair Wells, Vice Chair Kerr, and Committee Members,

The Maryland Association of Election Officials (MAEO) is the professional membership organization representing local election officials and Election Boards across all 24 jurisdictions in Maryland. Our members are committed to ensuring the smooth and effective administration of elections and to making Maryland elections accessible, secure, and fair. MAEO appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 156, which would authorize unaffiliated voters to request to affiliate with a political party at an early voting center during a primary election and ensure that the resulting provisional ballot is deemed valid and counted for that party.

Currently, Maryland election law requires that party affiliation changes be made before the close of voter registration prior to an election. Once registration closes, a voter's party affiliation cannot be changed until after the election. This deadline supports orderly election administration by maintaining the integrity of pollbook data and enabling officials to reliably determine ballot inventory requirements and supplies to execute the provisional voting process for early voting.

MAEO is concerned that HB156 is designated as an emergency bill, meaning it would take effect immediately upon enactment. This timeline leaves virtually no window for the comprehensive voter education necessary to inform the public of such a fundamental change to primary eligibility. Without a robust, funded education element, there is a high risk of voter confusion at the polls, as many voters may not understand the specific limitations of this policy or the provisional process required to implement it.

Furthermore, this bill presents considerable administrative challenges for local election officials. Provisional ballots require far more time and attention from election judges and board staff than regular ballots. Local Boards of Elections (LBEs) already dedicate extensive resources following an election to process provisional applications before the canvass begins. While we cannot predict the exact volume of unaffiliated voters who will utilize this new statute, we are certain that the number of provisional ballots will increase substantially.

An increase in provisional ballots would also extend check-in times, increase the likelihood of errors, and create operational inefficiencies. These delays could frustrate voters and put added pressure on election judges who are already managing complex election procedures.

MAEO is committed to ensuring fair, efficient, and accessible elections. We appreciate efforts to expand voter participation; however, we respectfully urge the General Assembly to consider the substantial increase in administrative burden presented by HB156.