



TESTIMONY FOR HB0156

Election Law - Affiliating with a Party and Voting - Unaffiliated Voters

Bill Sponsor: Delegate Fair

Committee: Government, Labor, and Elections

Organization Submitting: Maryland Legislative Coalition

Person Submitting: Aileen Alex, co-chair

Position: FAVORABLE

I am submitting this testimony in favor of HB0156 on behalf of the Maryland Legislative Coalition. The Maryland Legislative Coalition is an association of activists - individuals and grassroots groups in every district in the state. We are unpaid citizen lobbyists, and our Coalition supports well over 30,000 members.

Our members believe that voting is the soul of our democracy, and that the State's laws should provide for the easiest possible access to voting for everyone. One frustration for many new, young voters is the deadlines for affiliating with a party in relation to being eligible to vote in a primary. Most young voters are undecided about their affiliation, and only decide to vote in a primary based on who is running, or based on a perceived need to have their vote counted in the primary. These are not decisions that are made well in advance of the primary, and those voters who are not prepared to make an affiliation early are disenfranchised.

Since the primaries in Maryland often decide the entire election, being able to vote in a primary is pretty important. This bill, if enacted, would allow a voter who has declined to affiliate with a party to request to affiliate at an early voting center. The election judge would determine if the voter resides in the county in which the voter seeks to vote, and if so, would issue the voter a voter authority card and a ballot for the party they wish to affiliate with.

This is a common-sense policy that will ensure that participation in primaries has fewer barriers, especially for young voters. We support this bill and recommend a **FAVORABLE** report in committee.