

February 4, 2024

Testimony on HB 156
Election Law – Affiliating with a Party and Voting – Unaffiliated Voters
Government, Labor, and Elections

Position: Favorable

Common Cause Maryland supports HB 156 which would allow unaffiliated, registered voters to change their registration to a party during the early voting period.

Currently, registered but unaffiliated voters who would like to register under a recognized political party to participate in Maryland’s closed primary process must do so 21 days before the election. However, unregistered voters may show up in the week before the election, register, and choose a party affiliation.

This is no small problem in our state, where the number of unaffiliated voters has grown at a rapid pace over the past decade. State voter registration data from December 2023 shows that over 850,000 voters in Maryland are currently registered as unaffiliated. Many voters choose to register as unaffiliated in order to express their disapproval of the two major political parties, but few are aware that such a registration will affect their ability to fully participate in Maryland’s primaries.

While those hundreds of thousands of Marylanders can freely participate in the general election, they are unable to meaningfully participate in Maryland’s closed-primary system. And in a state where demographic realities and partisan gerrymandering basically guarantee many races to certain political parties, our current way of doing things leaves unaffiliated voters shut out of the most important election of the cycle.

HB 156 would allow for more voters to have a more meaningful impact on the democratic process in a way that would not materially impact the state’s current preference for closed primaries. For these reasons, we support HB 156 and urge a favorable report from the committee.