

# HOUSE BILL 44

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HB 816/25 – W&M

(PRE-FILED)

6lr0710  
CF SB 29

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By: Delegate Feldmark

Requested: August 20, 2025

Introduced and read first time: January 14, 2026

Assigned to: Government, Labor, and Elections

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## A BILL ENTITLED

1 AN ACT concerning

2 **Election Law – Petitions and Ballot Questions – Contents, Plain Language  
3 Requirement, and Procedures**

4 FOR the purpose of altering the information that is required to be included on the signature  
5 page of a petition seeking to place a question on the ballot and with a question on  
6 the ballot; requiring that a certain summary included on the signature page of a  
7 petition seeking to place a question on the ballot and a certain statement about a  
8 question on the ballot be written in plain language; altering the deadline by which  
9 ballot questions must be prepared and certified; requiring the State Board of  
10 Elections to make certain information regarding a ballot question available for a  
11 public comment period; requiring the State Board and each applicable local board of  
12 elections to post certain information relating to certain ballot questions for at least  
13 a certain period of time before the general election; and generally relating to petitions  
14 and ballot questions.

15 BY repealing and reenacting, with amendments,  
16 Article – Election Law  
17 Section 6–103(b), 6–201(c) and (d), 7–103(b) and (c), 7–105, and 9–207  
18 Annotated Code of Maryland  
19 (2022 Replacement Volume and 2025 Supplement)

20 BY repealing and reenacting, without amendments,  
21 Article – Election Law  
22 Section 6–201(a)  
23 Annotated Code of Maryland  
24 (2022 Replacement Volume and 2025 Supplement)

25 SECTION 1. BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF MARYLAND,  
26 That the Laws of Maryland read as follows:

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EXPLANATION: CAPITALS INDICATE MATTER ADDED TO EXISTING LAW.

[Brackets] indicate matter deleted from existing law.



## Article – Election Law

2 6-103.

3 (b) (1) The State Board shall:

4 (i) prepare guidelines and instructions relating to the petition  
5 process; and

(ii) design and arrange to have sample forms available to the public conforming to this title for each purpose for which a petition is authorized by law.

11 (I) CONSIDER ANY GENERALLY ACCEPTED GUIDELINES  
12 REGARDING COMPLIANCE WITH THE FEDERAL PLAIN WRITING ACT OF 2010; AND

13 (II) PROHIBIT THE USE OF THE PASSIVE VOICE, LEGAL JARGON,  
14 AND DOUBLE NEGATIVES.

17 6-201.

18 (a) A petition shall contain:

19 (1) an information page; and

20 (2) signature pages containing not less than the total number of signatures  
21 required by law to be filed.

22 (c) Each signature page shall contain:

23 (1) a description of the subject and purpose of the petition, conforming to  
24 the requirements of regulations;

25 (2) if the petition seeks to place a question on the ballot[, either]:

26 (i) A BRIEF TITLE THAT DESCRIBES THE TOPIC, GOAL, OR  
27 OUTCOME OF THE BALLOT QUESTION;

(II) 1. a fair and accurate summary of the substantive provisions  
of the proposal **WRITTEN IN PLAIN, CLEAR LANGUAGE THAT:**

#### A. A VOTER CAN EASILY UNDERSTAND;

9 (3) a statement, to which each signer subscribes, that:

10 (i) the signer supports the purpose of that petition process; and

14 (4) spaces for signatures and the required information relating to the  
15 signers;

16 (5) a space for the name of the county in which each of the signers of that  
17 page is a registered voter;

18 (6) a space for the required affidavit made and executed by the circulator;  
19 and

20 (7) any other information required by regulation.

21 (d) If the petition seeks to place a question on the ballot and the sponsor elects to  
22 print a summary of the proposal on each signature page as provided in subsection [(c)(2)(i)]  
23 **(C)(2)(II)1** of this section:

24 (1) the circulator shall have the full text of the proposal present at the time  
25 and place that each signature is affixed to the page; and

26 (2) the signature page shall state that the full text is available from the  
27 circulator.

28 7-103.

29 (b) Each question shall appear on the ballot containing the following information:

(1) a question number or letter as determined under subsection (d) of this

(2) a brief designation of the type or source of the question:

(3) a brief [descriptive] title in boldface type THAT DESCRIBES THE  
LAW OR OUTCOME OF THE BALLOT QUESTION:

(4) a condensed statement [of the purpose of the question] **DESCRIBING THE POLICY TO BE ADOPTED IN PLAIN AND CLEAR LANGUAGE THAT:**

## (I) A VOTER CAN EASILY UNDERSTAND:

(II) DOES NOT EXPLAIN THE LEGAL MECHANISM PROVIDING  
CHANGE; AND

(III) DOES NOT CONTAIN LEGAL JARGON OR USE DOUBLE  
THE PASSIVE VOICE: [and]

(5) the voting choices that the voter has: AND

(6) A BRIEF STATEMENT EXPLAINING WHAT THE PRACTICAL  
OF EACH VOTING CHOICE WOULD BE

(c) (1) [The] ON OR BEFORE JULY 1 IMMEDIATELY PRECEDING A  
RAL ELECTION, THE Secretary of State shall prepare and certify to the State Board[.]  
ter than the 95th day before the general election,] the information required under  
ction (b) of this section, for all statewide ballot questions and all questions relating to  
actment of the General Assembly which is petitioned to referendum.

(2) [The] ON OR BEFORE JULY 1 IMMEDIATELY PRECEDING A  
ELECTION, THE State Board shall prepare and certify to the appropriate local  
eater than the 105th day before the general election,] the information required  
ction (b) of this section for all questions that have been referred to the voters of  
er part of one county pursuant to an enactment of the General Assembly.

(3) (i) [The] ON OR BEFORE JULY 1 IMMEDIATELY PRECEDING A  
ELECTION, THE county attorney of the appropriate county shall prepare and  
the State Board[, not later than the 95th day before the general election,] the  
required under subsection (b) of this section for each question to be voted on in  
city or part of a county, except a question covered by paragraph (1) or paragraph  
subsection.

30 7-105.

31                   (a)    A local board shall provide notice of each question to be submitted statewide  
32 and each question to be submitted to the voters of the county, by:

(2) publication or dissemination by mass communication during the 3 weeks immediately preceding the general election at which a question will appear on the ballot.

4 (b) (1) For any question submitted under Article XIV or Article XVI of the  
5 Maryland Constitution, the notice required by subsection (a) of this section shall contain  
6 the information specified in § 7-103(b) of this title and a brief statement, prepared in clear  
7 and concise language, devoid of technical and legal terms to the extent practicable,  
8 summarizing the question.

9 (2) The statement required under paragraph (1) of this subsection shall be:

(i) prepared by the Department of Legislative Services;

(ii) approved by the Attorney General; and

(iii) submitted to the State Board by the first Monday in August.

(3) The statement required under paragraph (1) of this subsection is  
if it is:

(i) contained in an enactment by the General Assembly, and the specifies that the statement is to be used on the ballot; or

(ii) consistent with some other process mandated by the Maryland

(c) The State Board shall adopt regulations governing notice of questions to be voted on the ballot, including the use and content of specimen ballots and the publication and dissemination of notice by mass communication.

22 (d) (1) The complete text of a question shall be posted or available for public  
23 inspection in the office of the State Board and each applicable local board for 65 days prior  
24 to the general election.

29 (3) An individual may receive without charge a copy of the complete text of  
30 all constitutional amendments and questions from a local board, either in person, by mail,  
31 or electronically.

32                   **(E) THE STATE BOARD AND EACH APPLICABLE LOCAL BOARD SHALL POST**  
33                   **IN A MANNER WIDELY ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC FOR AT LEAST 90 DAYS BEFORE**  
34                   **THE GENERAL ELECTION:**

**(1) THE COMPLETE TEXT OF:**

2 (I) FOR A QUESTION RELATING TO THE CREATION OR  
3 ADOPTION OF A NEW CONSTITUTION, THE PROPOSED CONSTITUTION;

4 (II) FOR AN AMENDMENT UNDER ARTICLE XIV OF THE  
5 MARYLAND CONSTITUTION, THE PROPOSED AMENDMENT TO THE MARYLAND  
6 CONSTITUTION;

7 (III) FOR AN ENACTMENT OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY  
8 REFERRED IN ACCORDANCE WITH ARTICLE XVI OF THE MARYLAND  
9 CONSTITUTION, THE ENACTMENT;

10 (IV) FOR A PROPOSED COUNTY CHARTER OR AMENDMENT TO A  
11 COUNTY CHARTER UNDER ARTICLE XI-A OF THE MARYLAND CONSTITUTION:

## 1. THE PROPOSED CHARTER; OR

## 2. THE PROPOSED AMENDMENT TO A COUNTY CHARTER:

14 (V) FOR AN ENACTMENT OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY  
15 REFERRING A QUESTION TO THE VOTERS, THE ENACTMENT; AND

16 (VI) FOR A CHARTER COUNTY ENACTMENT IN ACCORDANCE  
17 WITH § 9-205 OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ARTICLE OR A CODE COUNTY  
18 ENACTMENT IN ACCORDANCE WITH §§ 9-310 THROUGH 9-313 OF THE LOCAL  
19 GOVERNMENT ARTICLE, THE PROPOSED ENACTMENT; AND

23 9-207.

24           (a) The State Board shall certify and publicly display the content and  
25 arrangement of each ballot:

(1) for a primary election, at least 64 days before the election;

27 (2) for a general election, at least 64 days before the election;

28 (3) for a special primary election, at least 55 days before the election; and

(4) for a special general election, not later than a date specified in the Governor's proclamation.

5 (c) The State Board shall publicly display the content and arrangement of each  
6 certified ballot on its website.

10 (e) Unless a delay is required by court order, the State Board may begin to print  
11 the ballots after certification and 3 days of public display and correct any noted errors.

12 (F) THE CERTIFICATION OF A BALLOT UNDER THIS SECTION THAT  
13 INCLUDES A QUESTION MAY NOT BE CONSTRUED TO BE A CERTIFICATION OF THE  
14 BALLOT LANGUAGE REQUIRED TO BE INCLUDED ON THE BALLOT UNDER § 7-103 OF  
15 THIS ARTICLE, INCLUDING THE PLAIN LANGUAGE CONDENSED STATEMENT  
16 REQUIRED UNDER § 7-103(B)(4) OF THIS ARTICLE.

17 SECTION 2. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, That this Act shall take effect June  
18 1, 2026.