

HOUSE BILL 101

G1, B1

EMERGENCY BILL
(PRE-FILED)

6lr1589

By: **Delegate Simmons**

Requested: October 31, 2025

Introduced and read first time: January 14, 2026

Assigned to: Government, Labor, and Elections and Appropriations

A BILL ENTITLED

1 AN ACT concerning

2 **Public Broadcasters – Debate for Candidates for Statewide Office – Required**
3 **Participants**

4 FOR the purpose of requiring a public broadcaster that holds a debate between candidates
5 for statewide office to invite all candidates who are certified to the ballot in the
6 general election subject to certain requirements; prohibiting a public broadcaster
7 from using or receiving State funds under certain circumstances for a certain amount
8 of time; requiring the Maryland Public Broadcasting Commission to request an
9 amended appropriation to reappropriate State funds from a public broadcaster to
10 another program under certain circumstances; requiring the Governor to approve an
11 amended appropriation to reappropriate State funds from a public broadcaster under
12 certain circumstances; and generally relating to a requirement for public
13 broadcasters to include candidates in a debate.

14 BY repealing and reenacting, without amendments,
15 Article – Education
16 Section 24–201
17 Annotated Code of Maryland
18 (2022 Replacement Volume and 2025 Supplement)

19 BY adding to
20 Article – Education
21 Section 24–208
22 Annotated Code of Maryland
23 (2022 Replacement Volume and 2025 Supplement)

24 Preamble

25 WHEREAS, State-funded media, including Maryland Public Television, receive
26 public funds to serve the people of the State; and

EXPLANATION: CAPITALS INDICATE MATTER ADDED TO EXISTING LAW.

[Brackets] indicate matter deleted from existing law.



1 WHEREAS, The State has a compelling interest in ensuring that public institutions
2 uphold principles of fairness, neutrality, and access to information for all voters; and

3 WHEREAS, Restricting participation in debates to candidates from only certain
4 political parties or candidates meeting certain polling thresholds denies voters the
5 opportunity to hear from all individuals who will appear on the general election ballot; and

6 WHEREAS, The public interest is best served when voters are informed of all choices
7 available to them through transparent and inclusive public forums; now, therefore,

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

10 **Article – Education**

11 24–201.

12 There is a Maryland Public Broadcasting Commission.

13 **24–208.**

14 (A) (1) IN THIS SECTION THE FOLLOWING WORDS HAVE THE MEANINGS
15 INDICATED.

16 (2) “GENERAL ELECTION” INCLUDES A SPECIAL GENERAL ELECTION.

17 (3) “PUBLIC BROADCASTER” MEANS A BROADCASTER THAT
18 RECEIVES FUNDS, INCLUDING GRANTS OR LOANS, FROM THE STATE IN A GIVEN
19 FISCAL YEAR.

20 (B) IT IS THE INTENT OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY TO:

21 (1) PROMOTE OPEN, DEMOCRATIC DISCOURSE;

22 (2) STRENGTHEN PUBLIC CONFIDENCE IN THE STATE’S DEMOCRATIC
23 INSTITUTIONS; AND

24 (3) ENSURE THAT STATE FUNDING FOR PUBLIC BROADCASTERS IS
25 CONDITIONED ON THE INVITATION OF ALL CANDIDATES TO A DEBATE WHO ARE
26 CERTIFIED TO THE BALLOT FOR A GENERAL ELECTION FOR STATEWIDE OFFICE.

27 (C) A PUBLIC BROADCASTER THAT HOLDS A DEBATE BETWEEN
28 CANDIDATES FOR STATEWIDE OFFICE:

1 (1) SHALL INVITE TO PARTICIPATE ALL CANDIDATES FOR THAT
2 STATEWIDE OFFICE WHO ARE CERTIFIED TO THE BALLOT IN THE GENERAL
3 ELECTION IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE APPLICABLE PROVISIONS OF THE ELECTION
4 LAW ARTICLE;

5 (2) SHALL PROVIDE EQUITABLE OPPORTUNITY TO EACH
6 PARTICIPATING CANDIDATE TO CONTRIBUTE AND RESPOND IN THE DEBATE; AND

7 (3) MAY NOT CONDITION ELIGIBILITY FOR OR INVITATIONS TO THE
8 DEBATE ON CAMPAIGN FUNDRAISING METRICS, PARTY AFFILIATION, OR POLLING
9 METRICS.

10 (D) NOTHING IN THIS SECTION SHALL REQUIRE A PUBLIC BROADCASTER TO
11 INVITE A CANDIDATE TO PARTICIPATE IN A DEBATE WHO:

12 (1) IS A WRITE-IN CANDIDATE; OR

13 (2) HAS FORMALLY OR INFORMALLY SUSPENDED OR TERMINATED
14 THE CANDIDATE'S CAMPAIGN.

15 (E) (1) IF A PUBLIC BROADCASTER HOLDS A DEBATE IN VIOLATION OF
16 SUBSECTION (C) OF THIS SECTION, FOR THE REMAINDER OF THE FISCAL YEAR IN
17 WHICH THE DEBATE OCCURS:

18 (I) THE PUBLIC BROADCASTER MAY NOT USE STATE FUNDS;
19 AND

20 (II) A UNIT OF STATE GOVERNMENT MAY NOT PROVIDE FUNDS
21 TO THE PUBLIC BROADCASTER.

22 (2) (I) THE COMMISSION SHALL SUBMIT A PROPOSED AMENDED
23 APPROPRIATION TO THE SECRETARY OF BUDGET AND MANAGEMENT TO REQUEST
24 THAT ANY REMAINING STATE FUNDS FROM A PUBLIC BROADCASTER THAT VIOLATES
25 SUBSECTION (C) OF THIS SECTION BE REAPPROPRIATED TO ANOTHER PROGRAM
26 FOR THE CURRENT FISCAL YEAR.

27 (II) THE GOVERNOR SHALL APPROVE AN AMENDED
28 APPROPRIATION SUBMITTED IN ACCORDANCE WITH SUBPARAGRAPH (I) OF THIS
29 PARAGRAPH.

30 SECTION 2. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, That this Act is an emergency
31 measure, is necessary for the immediate preservation of the public health or safety, has
32 been passed by a yea and nay vote supported by three-fifths of all the members elected to

1 each of the two Houses of the General Assembly, and shall take effect from the date it is
2 enacted.