



TESTIMONY TO THE SENATE EDUCATION, HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

SB 56 Election Law - Petitions and Ballot Questions - Plain Language Requirement

POSITION: Support with amendment

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The League of Women Voters was founded to promote political responsibility through informed and active participation in government. When ballot measures are presented in language that is overly technical, it becomes a barrier to voter participation. This bill seeks to ensure that petitions as well as ballot measures will be readily understood by the average voter.

The League of Women Voters of Maryland supports the intent of SB 56, which proposes a plain language requirement for ballot questions. When ballot question language is confusing, voters may choose to not vote on that issue, which eliminates their opportunity to impact public policy.

Sixteen states specify that ballot language must be easy to understand. We understand that ballot language is often constrained by legal requirements to make sure that it truly reflects the intent of the question based on legal standards. Therefore, we believe that if you chose to support this legislation that would enable voters to participate more effectively in the democratic process, this bill should be amended to authorize the Board of Elections and/or the Secretary of State, to review the implementation of plain language requirements in other states and report to the General Assembly as soon as practical, but at least in time for use before the adoption of 2022 General Election ballot question language. Such a study would both identify the best practices and identify the resources that would be needed to ensure that the mandate of this law would be implemented effectively.