



**Maryland Developmental  
Disabilities Council**

EMPOWERMENT • OPPORTUNITY • INCLUSION

**Ways & Means Committee  
January 29, 2020**

**HB 140: Election Law - Petitions and Ballot Questions - Plain Language Requirement  
Position: Support**

The Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council (DD Council) is a statewide public policy organization that promotes the full inclusion of people with developmental disabilities in all aspects of community life by eliminating barriers, creating opportunities, empowering people, and promoting innovation. The DD Council is led by people with developmental disabilities and their families. From that perspective, the DD Council supports HB 140.

Voting is a fundamental right that Maryland's citizens with developmental disabilities want and need to participate in. While much has been done to increase access to and the transparency of voting in Maryland; HB 140 is much needed to ensure all of Maryland's voters can access their fundamental right to vote fairly and independently.

Petitions and ballot questions can be confusing for everyone. A lack of clear understanding may lead to a question being abandoned or answered in haste because the voter does not feel equipped to understand the question. This is especially true for people with developmental disabilities.

HB 140 addresses those concerns by requiring that a brief explanation of a petition or ballot question's provisions are presented to the voter in language comprehensible to someone with a 6th grade reading level. This bill is a step in the right direction towards informing and empowering all of the voters of Maryland, including those with developmental disabilities.

Contact: Keith Walmsley, Director of Public Policy Initiatives  
KWalmsley@md-council.org