

230215-SB0089-Ballot-quest-65-day-post-time.pdf

Uploaded by: Christine Hunt

Position: FAV

Christine Hunt and Jay Crouthers
1014 Dockser Drive
Crownsville, MD 21032

February 15, 2023

Maryland General Assembly
Members of the Education, Energy and the Environment Committee
Annapolis, MD

RE: SB0089-Elections-Ballot Questions-Publication of Proposed Laws

Dear Senators,

We support SB 89 and respectfully request that you vote for it.

This bill would allow ample time for citizens to review them and gather more information that will assist them in their voting decision.

AMENDMENT: This is for "certain" questions. Make it for "all" questions.

Sincerely,

Christine Hunt and Jay Crouthers

SB89Testimony_SenCarter.pdf

Uploaded by: Jill Carter

Position: FAV



THE SENATE OF MARYLAND

ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Testimony of Senator Jill P. Carter

**In Favor of SB89 - Elections - Ballot Questions - Publication of
Proposed Laws**

Before the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

February 16, 2023

Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and Members of the Committee:

SB89 requires ballot question language and affecting legislation be published on the Board of Elections website at least 65 days prior to the election, improving access to and transparency of information. This will allow voters to be better informed by providing full details and the actual item that they are being asked to adopt by ballot question.

Ballot questions are a critical and fundamental piece of democracy; when policy questions are so important, we put them to the test of the people. Despite their importance, voters often have the most confusion about the implications and effects, in part due to the lack of published information.

In 2022, there were five statewide ballot questions and several local questions proposed by the jurisdictions. All the statewide questions were overwhelmingly adopted, with the lowest approval being 62%, despite party registration percentages being much narrower, indicating a possible lack of awareness. While these questions were spread to voters in several channels, such as sample ballots, the affecting legislation was only accessible through digging through the General Assembly website—often requiring several hours. In some

past elections the Board of Elections had posted links to the affecting legislation, but this did not happen in 2022, further confusing voters. SB89 will ensure consistency and continuance across cycles.

Transparency in governance and elections is critical. We must ensure that the electorate is fully educated of the crucial decisions put before them. Publishing the questions will give voters time to familiarize and prepare themselves before they enter the ballot box. When voters are aware, they make more objective decisions and democracy works at its best.

I respectfully request a favorable report on SB89 so that we can empower the electorate to make informed decisions and build a stronger democracy.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jill P. Carter". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jill P. Carter, Esq.

SB 89 - Elections - Ballot Questions - Publication

Uploaded by: Morgan Drayton

Position: FAV

February 16, 2023

Testimony on SB 89
Elections - Ballot Questions - Publication of Proposed Laws
Education, Energy, and the Environment

Position: Favorable

Common Cause Maryland is in favor of SB 89. The bill would require the State and local boards of elections to post in a manner widely accessible to the public the complete text of certain proposed ballot questions for at least 65 days before the General Election.

The public can only benefit from increased access and transparency within our legislative process, especially when it comes to the decisions that could have an effect on them and their communities. And for those who choose to vote in person, the public posting of ballot questions gives voters another opportunity to familiarize themselves with the issues before they step to the ballot box on Election Day.

One friendly amendment we would urge the committee to adopt is a plain language requirement, to ensure that the information being communicated is clear, concise, and understandable to the average member of the public.

Increased access and transparency around ballot questions will lead to a more informed electorate, and for that reason we request a favorable report on SB 89.

LWVMD testimony - SB 89 - Elections - Ballot Quest

Uploaded by: Janet Millenson

Position: FWA



**TESTIMONY TO THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION, ENERGY, AND
THE ENVIRONMENT**

SB 89 – Elections – Ballot Questions – Publication of Proposed Laws

POSITION: Favorable With Amendments

BY: Nancy Soreng, President

DATE: February 16, 2023

The League of Women Voters of Maryland, a nonpartisan organization with 1500 members statewide, supports an equitable and accessible election system that increases voter participation. Unfortunately, voters' voices often aren't heard on proposed changes that could significantly affect them. Although there are numerous opportunities to learn about the leading candidates for major offices, many voters only see ballot questions for the first time when they're actually voting. It's not the best situation for making a thoughtful choice — and some voters may decide not to choose at all. Fewer votes are tallied for ballot questions than for state offices.

Senate Bill 89 would ensure that voters are informed in a timely fashion of the contents of ballot questions by posting the complete text "in a manner widely accessible to the public for at least 65 days before the General Election." That's a good start. However, we'd like to propose a friendly amendment to the bill to require that ballot questions be written in **plain language**. According to Wikipedia, "Some scholars view plain language from a social justice perspective as a means of increasing equal access to information, especially for marginalized populations that might have decreased access to education." All Marylanders, regardless of education level, deserve clear communications.

The League of Women Voters of Maryland urges a favorable with amendments report on SB 89.

DRM_SB 89_FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Samuela Ansah

Position: FWA

EDUCATION, ENERGY, AND ENVIROMENT COMMITTEE

February 10, 2023

SB 89 – Elections – Ballot Questions – Publication of Proposed Laws

Position: SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS

Disability Rights Maryland (DRM – formerly Maryland Disability Law Center) is the Protection & Advocacy agency in Maryland, mandated to advance the civil rights of people with disabilities. DRM works to increase opportunities for Marylanders with disabilities to be part of their communities through voting by advocating for equal and equitable access to the ballot.

DRM supports SB 89 which will require the State and local Board of Elections to publish the enactment language of a ballot question at least 65 days prior to a general election. As part of our voting program, we often refer voters to the State Board of Elections to access the sample question for a preview of what they will see prior to voting. However, the sample ballot and real ballot language of ballot petitions and questions are often very complex and hard to understand. Voters often have a hard time completely understanding what will happen if they vote for or against a particular ballot petition. It can be hard to understand what will change in public policy as a result of their vote as ballot questions can be vague and only describe the outcome of an enactment in a few words or in complex legalistic language that doesn't completely capture the context of the petition or the impact it will have in our communities.

For example, during the 2021 legislative session, SB 786 which transitions the control of the Baltimore Police Department to the control of Baltimore City after a referendum to voters. It appeared on the 2022 general election ballot in Baltimore City as Question H which vaguely asked “Question H is for the purpose of establishing a Baltimore City Police Department, the head of which is the Police Commissioner.¹”. Having the proper context of SB 786 could allow voters to have complete context of the ballot petition and make an informed decision.

¹ [Official 2022 Election Results \(maryland.gov\)](https://www.maryland.gov/elections/2022/election-results)

¹ <https://www.md-council.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Voting-Fact-Sheet.pdf>



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Meaningful access to the ballot should ensure voters understand what they will be voting on.

Supplying voters with the language of the enactment of each ballot petition provides transparency and clarity to a voter to make an informed decision about the society they live in.

This would be a positive measure for voters with disabilities, who often rely on sample ballots to practice filling out their ballots prior to election day. SB 89 will provide them additional context to the ballot questions they will encounter and engage in critical thinking and decision making for the benefit of their lives and communities. To that end, we recommend there be an amendment for the enactment language SB 89 provides be in plain language to aid in easier comprehension of all voters.

For these reasons and with this amendment we urge a **favorable** report on SB 89. Please do not hesitate to contact me at samuelaa@disabilityrightsmd.org, or by phone at 443-692-2512

¹<https://www.md-council.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Voting-Fact-Sheet.pdf>