



TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE

HB 177 – Elections – Ballot Questions – Publication of Proposed Laws

POSITION: Favorable With Amendments

BY: Nancy Soreng, President

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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.

House Bill 177 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 amending 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 HB 177.