



TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE

SB 480 Protecting Election Officials Act 2024

POSITION: Favorable

BY: Linda Kohn, President

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The League of Women Voters of Maryland is a nonpartisan organization with a mission to educate all voters and expand civic involvement. LWVMD's position on Voting Rights and Election Administration calls for an election system that is representative, feasible to implement and increases voter participation. Protecting elections officials is a crucial element of preserving the democratic system.

As Maryland, and much of the country, saw during the elections of 2022 it is becoming more and more common for election officials to experience harm, harassment, bullying, threats, and in rare cases doxxing. SB480 would aid our elections system by giving officials recourse if they are in danger. The passage of this bill could also persuade those who are contemplating becoming judges that they will be protected.

Election judges typically work a 15- or 16-hour day on Election Day, plus mandatory participation at polling places set up the night before, which can take another two hours, as well as hours during Early Voting. Officials also go through extensive training that is unpaid.

Many election judges sign up because they feel a strong commitment to civic duty and enjoy helping voters. However, recruiting enough judges has become increasingly challenging for local election boards. Finding, training, and retaining enough people to staff polling places is not easy. This year the need for judges is even greater. In 2020 and again in 2022 Maryland has seen shortages in needed judges. LWVMD is hopeful that an increase in pay for returning judges will inspire many to reprise the role, but safety remains a top concern. SB480 addresses these concerns.

The League of Women Voters urges a favorable report on SB 480.