



TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS

HB 563 Election Law – Local Boards of Elections - Language-Related Assistance

Position: Favorable

From: Linda Kohn, President

Date: February 13, 2024

The League of Women Voters of Maryland, representing voters in every district of Maryland, has a firm position that elections should increase voter participation, be easy for voters to understand, and most importantly, ensure minority views and interests have some influence in selecting elected officials.

Maryland is fortunate to be a majority-minority state now. However, with that comes a responsibility to ensure that all voters have the necessary tools and information during an election cycle. HB 563 is critical to voters and how they process election information. Too often, the League hears stories of voters whose primary language is not English, having to rely on family members to assist them at the polls, or worse, not knowing that they can request an interpreter. Marylanders cannot participate in democracy if they are locked out due to language; if that happens, then we have lost our representative democracy.

This year alone, Maryland will join 29 other states in its need for expansion of language access guidelines and translation services. HB 563 would expand the current federal law and allow for more voters to get the assistance they need to vote. Under the federal Voting Rights Act, language access only has to be granted when the population in need of that language is at 5%. HB 563 would lower that threshold to 2%, allowing more voters to receive the information they need to be informed voters.

Maryland has an opportunity to continue being an example by leading the charge for a more inclusive, representative, and fair democracy.

The League of Women Voters urges a favorable report.