

Maryland Green Party
SB 267
Favorable With Amendment

Chair and Members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on Senate Bill 267 (SB 267). The Maryland Green Party has used the New Party petition process addressed in this bill seven separate times, likely more than any other political party in Maryland's history.

We strongly support this bill *with amendments* to incorporate provisions from House Bill 642, The Ballot Petition Modernization Act, sponsored by Delegate Ruth.

We fully support the provision to change the submission deadline from August to July, it is safer for our volunteer and paid petitioners who have to collect petition signatures in person. July is the hottest month of the year in Maryland, and with climate change it is only getting hotter.

In May of 2024 a longtime petitioner for the Maryland Green Party, Darryl Bonner, suffered a stroke and passed away from pre-existing health conditions. In July another petitioner had to go to the ER after heat exhaustion while collecting signatures. While Darryl's death was not a result of the July heat or our petition campaign, it is a reminder of the human cost of New Party Petition drives. Having the final month of the campaign occur during the hottest month of the year is bad for new political parties, as well as election workers.

However, we believe the provision eliminating a second submission of signatures is an unnecessary work around that could have unintended consequences, exacerbating the problem.

The problem SB 267 is trying to address, the difficulty election officials face in counting and validating tens of thousands of handwritten signatures, while meeting legally imposed deadlines, is a real one. This problem is compounded for a second submission of signatures, because the two-year window for valid signatures shifts with the second submission, and some signatures that may have been valid the first time might not be valid the second time, creating a logistical nightmare for elections workers.

Removing the opportunity for a second submission, **without solving the problems which lead to nearly 30 percent of signatures to be invalidated**, would incentivize new parties to compensate by submitting even more signatures in the first submission. Now we submit 17,000 signatures in order to get 10,000 valid signatures because we know we have an opportunity for a second submission if we fall short. Without that release valve, it is likely new parties would submit 20,000 to 25,000 signatures as insurance, increasing the burden on elections workers.

Fortunately, a stronger solution has already been introduced. HB 642(heard before this committee as SB 1029 in 2024), addresses this problem at its root, by requiring the State Board

of Elections to develop regulations making permanent the use of electronic signatures on petitions, and by making common sense reforms to the validation process. The experience with electronic signatures during the 2020 new party petition drives that occurred during the COVID state of emergency demonstrate that validating electronic signatures is significantly faster and has a higher validation rate.

Amending SB 267 to include the provisions of HB 642 would alleviate the need for removing the possibility of a second submission and would increase validation rates. Increasing validation rates decreases the number of signatures that need to be submitted and increases the likelihood that legitimate expressions of voter desire to see a new party formed are honored.

We urge a favorable report on this bill, with the amendments described here.

Respectfully submitted,

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