

SBE Testimony SB267:HB41.pdf

Uploaded by: Jared DeMarinis

Position: FAV



SB267 – Chair, Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee (By Request - Departmental)

Election Law - Petitions for the Formation of a New Political Party - Process

Purpose:

1. Changes the deadline to submit a new political party petition
2. Clarifies that petition submissions may not be re-used for subsequent petition efforts.

Comments:

The State Board of Elections supports the legislation. The proposed bill (1) moves the deadline to submit a political party petition and (2) clarifies that petition signatures may only be submitted once for review and certification.

The proposed legislation alleviates a period when multiple petitions submission deadlines occur on the same date. Numerous petition efforts occur at the same period (the first Monday in August): local charter petitions; candidate petitions; and new party petitions. By moving the new party deadline to July, it staggers the deadlines allowing the local board of elections staff to process petitions without needing additional temporary assistance to meet the 20 day certification time period.

Additionally, the change allows new political party candidates to file a certificate of nomination knowing the petition effort has been completed. Currently, a candidate for a newly organized political party needs to submit the required candidate filing paperwork (declaration of intent and certificate of candidacy) prior to the submission and recognition of the political party. Certification of the political party might occur 20 days after the candidate submission. In that period, the candidate and voters do not know whether that individual will be on the ballot. By moving the deadline to July, the candidate and other stakeholders will know whether the political party is certified before the filing deadline,

The bill clarifies that a new political party petition submission may not reuse submitted signatures if the initial submission failed to meet the certification threshold. The signator's intent was for that particular effort and should not be reused in other efforts to achieve certification.

Thank you and we look forward to your favorable passage of this bill.

Contacts:

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Final- SB267 - 2025.docx.pdf

Uploaded by: John Michael Gudger

Position: FAV



Maryland Association of Election Officials

Representing the Local Election Boards of the State of Maryland

February 5, 2025

Senator Brian J. Feldman, Chair
Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
2 West, Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401 February 5, 2025

SB267 - Support

Dear Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and Committee Members,

The Maryland Association of Election Officials (MAEO) is the professional membership organization representing local election officials and Election Boards across all 24 jurisdictions in the state. Our members are dedicated to ensuring the smooth and effective administration of elections, and we are deeply committed to making Maryland elections accessible, secure, and fair.

MAEO supports Senate Bill 267, which makes important improvements to the petition process for the formation of new political parties. These changes will increase efficiency and clarity for both election officials and those seeking to form new parties, while reducing administrative burdens on local boards of elections.

Under current law, local boards may face significant challenges managing the resubmission of petition signatures after an initial petition has already been rejected. The processing of the same, now outdated, signatures in subsequent petitions could create unnecessary work for election officials, consume valuable resources and may not reflect the current wishes of those who signed in a past petition. By preventing the resubmission of all signatures from a previously rejected petition, this bill will ensure that only fresh, valid signatures are considered, improving the integrity and efficiency of the petition review process.

MAEO recognizes that managing petition submissions is a time-intensive process that must be handled accurately and fairly. House Bill 41 provides a clear, streamlined approach that reduces confusion for petitioners and prevents election officials processing out-of-date petition signatures. By moving the cutoff date from the first Monday in August to the first Monday in July during gubernatorial and presidential election years, the bill ensures that local election officials are less likely to be overwhelmed with last-minute petition filings during the busiest times of the election cycle.

Ultimately, this legislation strikes a balance between maintaining open access to the political process and ensuring that election officials can focus their efforts on verifying new and valid submissions. MAEO believes that these improvements will strengthen Maryland's election processes and reduce administrative strain on local boards of elections.

We respectfully urge a favorable report on Senate Bill 267.

SB267_Maryland_Green_Party_FWA.pdf

Uploaded by: Andy Ellis

Position: FWA

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,

Andy Ellis

Maryland Green Party

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240-285-0843

2025 SB0267 Testimony Against 2025-02-05.pdf

Uploaded by: Alan Lang

Position: UNF

SB0267 - Unfavorable

Honorable Senators

Please enter an unfavorable report about SB0267.

Proposed section 4-102(c)(3) on page 2 lines 14-17 would prohibit reusing the signatures on a petition should the petition fail to meet the unstated requirements in subsection B of Article 4-102 and in the uncited subsection of Title 6.

Subsection B(2)(i) in 4-102 requires at least 10,000 valid signatures by a certain date to form a new political party.

Title 6, Subtitle 2, section 6-205(d) allows additional signatures to be added to a petition if the petition is rejected before the deadline by filing an amended information page with additional signature pages.

This bill would make a difficult process for obtaining valid signatures that much more difficult, if the number of valid signatures is determined to be less than 10,000. Currently, if time remains before the deadline, the organizers could keep the valid signatures and just obtain the signatures needed to reach the 10,000 threshold.

If this bill passes, the organizers would need to start over to obtain the needed 10,000 signatures.

This bill is creating an unfair burden on the citizenry trying to follow an already difficult process.

Please enter an unfavorable decision about SB0267.

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February 5, 2025

SB 0267 - Maryland Forward Party.pdf

Uploaded by: Philip Benenati

Position: UNF



Maryland Forward Party

January 31, 2025

Maryland Forward Party

PJ Benenati, Chair

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SB 0267:

Election Law - Petitions for the Formation of a New Political Party - Process

Position: Unfavorable

Dear Committee,

I am writing on behalf of the Maryland Forward Party and our 6,000 Maryland supporters. Forward Party is among the fastest growing political organizations in the United States and in Maryland. Though our organization has only existed for 2 years in Maryland, we saw a positive 39% growth from 2024 to 2025. Our organization is dedicated to protecting and enhancing our democracy and among our core values is our belief that all voices wanting to participate in our political process should be heard. This belief comes with the understanding that procedures can and should be in place to help identify legitimate political entities from those groups less serious about governing and political representation.

Maryland state law currently contains clear requirements to gain and maintain ballot access, including blackout windows of time where petition signatures are not permitted to be submitted, during statewide election years.



Maryland Forward Party

January 31, 2025

SB 0267 is proposing to expand this submission blackout window by a month, beginning in July instead of August. Maryland Forward Party would rather not increase this blackout window and would hope to instead maintain or decrease this window. Our organization, while understanding the immense workload on the state board of elections during an election year, believes that the bar for entry and to maintain ballot access is already incredibly demanding and our concern is that this proposed revision increases this difficulty and unnecessarily increases the barrier for entry. We do not believe that personnel or workload restrictions within the board of election should negatively impact the potential for the formation of a new or previously established political party. Board of Elections processes should ideally not be altered in a way that negatively impacts Maryland's democratic process and potentially limits the voices and representation of Maryland Voters.

Respectfully

PJ Benenati

Maryland Forward Party, Chair

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