



Maryland Forward Party

February 24, 2025

Maryland Forward Party

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HB 1280:

Election Law - Affiliating With a Party and Voting - Unaffiliated Voters

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. The Maryland Forward Party believes in the spirit of this bill and takes a favorable position on it, however we believe that it could be strengthened, with amended language.

A nation-wide 2024 Gallup Poll showed that over 50% of voting-aged Americans identify as politically-independent. In Maryland, we have a proud history of protecting voter rights and our precious democracy, however we are not perfect and we know there is still room for improvement. Our state's closed primary election system prevents approximately 20% of Maryland voters from participating in the primary election.

Below are the number of registered Maryland voters, who were unaffiliated with the Republicans or Democrats in the 2022 Gubernatorial Election, and were therefore unable to participate in the Primary Election. Also provided is the percentage that these voters represent, of the total registered voters, per County:



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Allegany (9,091 - 20.84%), **Anne Arundel** (102,677 - 25.26%), **Baltimore City** (63,303 - 16.02%), **Baltimore County** (116,788 - 20.73%), **Calvert** (16,290 - 23.96%), **Caroline** (4,796 - 22.22%), **Carroll** (30,262 - 23.72%), **Cecil** (17,700 - 25.17%), **Charles** (23,380 - 19.31%), **Dorchester** (4,101 - 18.09%), **Frederick** (50,739 - 25.92%), **Garrett** (3,093 - 15.16%), **Harford** (44,028 - 23.28%), **Howard** (59,559 - 25.95%), **Kent** (2,783 - 20.07%), **Montgomery** (166,232 - 24.69%), **Prince George's** (98,571 - 16.47%), **Queen Anne's** (8,513 - 21.72%), **Saint Mary's** (18,075 - 23.99%), **Somerset** (2,510 - 17.79%), **Talbot** (5,999 - 21.05%), **Washington** (23,740 - 23.95%), **Wicomico** (14,631 - 22.41%), **Worcester** (9,130 - 21.68%).

In Maryland, the Primary Elections are funded by the State and Maryland taxpayers and yet 895,991 tax-paying Maryland voters were unable to participate in the 2022 Gubernatorial Primary Election. For reference, this is higher than the total registered voters in Montgomery (673,373), Prince George's (598,407), or Baltimore (563,463) counties. In the spirit of "all Maryland voices being heard", we see our closed primary elections as an immediate opportunity for reform. This critically important election should be open and available to all Maryland tax-payers, regardless of party affiliation. Independent/unaffiliated voters are a rapidly growing population in America and this trend is expected to continue in Maryland. Now is the time to plan accordingly for the future, to accommodate this large and growing population.

Maryland Forward Party believes that HB 1280 is a step in the right direction but would propose that the language of the bill be amended to allow all unaffiliated voters to request a Republican or Democratic ballot, on the day of election, without requiring voters to change their party registration. We believe all voices should be allowed to participate regardless of party affiliation.

Respectfully

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