



TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE

HB 983 Election Law - Local Boards of Elections - Language-Related Assistance

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The League of Women Voters of Maryland believes that the election system should increase voter participation, be equitable, accessible, and easy to understand, and, most importantly, ensure that minority views and interests have some influence in selecting elected officials. HB 983 seeks to lower the threshold of English proficiency needed in a district to run elections in another language.

HB 983 will ensure that voters with limited English proficiency (LEP) are not excluded from the voting process. This bill provides more access for LEP voters by expanding election-related language assistance in the parts of Maryland where it is not already required by federal law and in languages not already covered by such federal protections.

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 983 is critical to how voters 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.

Last year, Maryland joined 29 other states that needed to expand language access guidelines and translation services. HB 983 would expand the current federal law and allow more voters to get the assistance they need to vote. Under the federal Voting Rights Act, language access is only granted when 5% of the population needs that language. HB 983 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.

LWVMD urges a favorable report on HB 983.