



Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council

CREATING CHANGE • IMPROVING LIVES

House Ways and Means Committee

HB 816: Election Law - Petitions and Ballot Questions – Contents, Plain Language Requirement,
and Procedures

February 18, 2025

Position: Support

The Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council (Council) is an independent public policy organization that creates change to make it possible for people with developmental disabilities to live the lives they want with the support they need. Our vision is that people with and without disabilities in Maryland live, learn, work, and play together.

WHAT does this legislation do?

- HB 816 makes changes to the way that petitions for new ballot questions and questions on a ballot are written. It requires that they are written in plain language, contains a brief summary of the practical outcome and prohibits the use of passive voice, legal jargon, and double negatives.
- Plain language is a way of writing so that all people can understand information the first time they read it.

WHY is this legislation important?

- This bill makes voting more accessible for people with disabilities. Voting is a fundamental right for Marylanders with developmental disabilities, but they face barriers. The U.S. Election Commission found that 20% of voters with disabilities face difficulties with voting, compared to 6% of voters without disabilities. But these difficulties can be eliminated.
- Writing ballot petitions and questions in plain language benefits everyone. Many ballot questions can be confusing for people with and without disabilities to understand. Using plain language makes it easier for all voters. When one group is served more effectively, all voters are able to vote more effectively. Everyone deserves to a smooth voting process so they can exercise their right to vote during every election cycle

While investments in voting equity are without question needed, including for people with disabilities, the Council believes that the amount, purpose, and timing of such efforts must take into consideration the needs of all Marylanders with disabilities. Funding for this bill should not be offset by limiting essential funding for other critical needs, most immediately the Developmental Disabilities Administration community services that thousands of Marylanders depend upon.

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