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Joint Audit and Evaluation Committee

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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
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SB132 Testimony: "Ballot Access"
Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
Wednesday, February 11, 2026, 2:00 PM

Almost 1 million Marylanders have chosen not to affiliate with a political party when registering to vote. Under current law, they must register with a political party at least 21 days before a primary in order to vote in all races. This requirement disadvantages those who are less engaged; less informed; or unaware of the cut-off date.

As dissatisfaction with both major parties grows, unaffiliated registration has surged. Between the [2022](#) and [2024](#) General Elections, Maryland added more than 80,000 unaffiliated voters-- bringing the total to 907,368. According to [The Baltimore Banner](#) (2024), increasing numbers of unaffiliated voters is a result of "growing hostility among Marylanders and Americans toward institutions and partisan politics."

Unaffiliated voters now make up roughly 21% of Maryland's electorate, yet they have little influence in determining which candidates advance to the General Election. Except in School Board races, they cannot participate in primary contests that usually decide the eventual winner.

This bill would simply extend the deadline for unaffiliated voters to register with a political party by 16 days-- through the end of Early Voting. Specifically:

In the 2026 Primary Election, Early Voting will be held from June 11-18. Primary Election Day will be June 23. Without this legislation, the deadline to affiliate would be June 2; with this bill, it would be June 18.]

The map on page three shows the partisan vote margins in our legislative districts in the 2022 General Election. It illustrates that 89% of Senate races were not remotely competitive. In 42 of the 47 districts, the winner earned more than 60% of the vote in November. This means that the choice was effectively made in the Primary Election. Hundreds of thousands of Marylanders were excluded from the election that mattered.

According to the [National Conference of State Legislatures](#), eight states (Arizona, Colorado, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Mexico, North Carolina, and Rhode Island) allow unaffiliated voters to cast ballots in partisan primaries, welcoming a large and growing share of

voters. [The Bipartisan Policy Center](#) (2024) found that participation among Asian and Latino voters increases, and the electorate becomes more reflective of state demographics.

During the 2023 and 2024 sessions, similar legislation (SB39 and SB99) advanced with strong support from the League of Women Voters of Maryland, Common Cause Maryland, Disability Rights Maryland, and For The People Maryland. Their testimony emphasized that excluding more than one in five voters from Primary Elections undermines equitable representation.

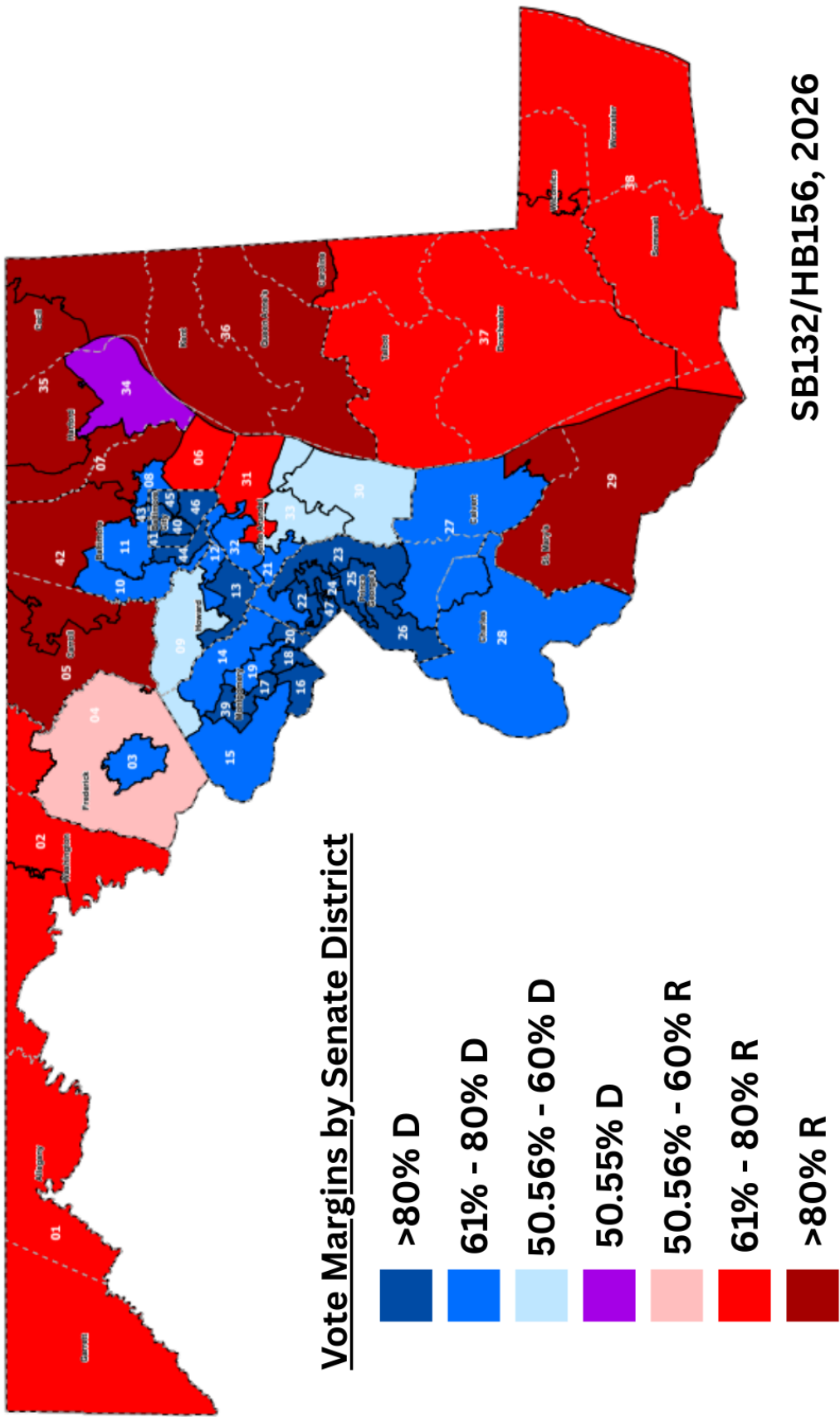
Please amend SB132 to an effective date of October 1, 2026. Our election officials need adequate lead time to update procedures and create marketing materials to ensure smooth and accurate implementation.

SB132 allows currently unaffiliated voters to have a voice earlier in the electoral process.

I respectfully urge a favorable report on SB132, as amended.

MD BALLOT ACCESS

Partisan Voting in the 2022 General Election



SB132/HB156, 2026
Sen. Kagan/Del. Fair