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**SB 29 - Election Law - Petitions and Ballot Questions –  
Contents, Plain Language Requirement, and Procedures  
Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee  
January 21, 2025  
11:00 AM  
FAVORABLE**

Chairman Feldman, Vice-Chair Kagan, and members of the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee, my name is Sara Westrick, Advocacy Director for AARP Maryland. I would like to thank Vice-Chair Kagan for introducing this important legislation.

AARP is a nonpartisan organization that does not donate to or endorse candidates. AARP, however, plans a broad array of voter engagement efforts to help older Americans exercise their right to vote. For example, AARP has created an online voter engagement hub that points readers to each state’s voting resources, where they can find information about voter registration, early voting, and absentee ballot procedures.

We believe all Marylanders should be able to exercise their right to vote freely, easily, and safely. SB 29 is important in achieving this because it helps provide clarity and accessibility for voters.

SB 29 emphasizes “plain language,” avoiding passive voice, legal jargon, and double negatives. This type of writing helps voters to understand ballot questions more easily. In addition, clear summaries and titles can reduce confusion and help voters make informed decisions.

The bill also enhances transparency in the ballot question process by creating a 15-day public comment period on ballot question language before it is finalized. This gives voters meaningful time to review and understand proposed ballot questions, see what policy changes are being considered ahead of time, and provide feedback to identify confusing, ambiguous, or misleading language before it is locked in.

SB 29 also expands requirements for posting the complete text of ballot questions for at least 90 days before the election and requires links to the full text of underlying legislation or constitutional amendments. This can help make subjects more accessible to all Marylanders, and therefore more readily researched and understood by voters.

The bill also directs the State Board of Elections to consider the Plain Writing Act of 2010 and align with federal readability practices, which benefit voters with varying literacy levels and disabilities. In short, plain language writing helps bridge gaps in age, education levels, language abilities, and more, supporting a more equitable voting experience.

For all these reasons, I respectfully urge the committee to vote in favor of SB 29 and help Marylanders more freely and easily exercise their right to vote, and thank you for considering this important legislation.

For additional follow-up, please contact Sara Westrick at [swestrick@arp.org](mailto:swestrick@arp.org) or 410-310-0374.