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Testimony from:  
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Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 132, “AN ACT Election Law – Affiliating With a Party and Voting – Unaffiliated Voters”

February 11, 2026

Senate Committee on Education, Energy, and the Environment

Chairman Feldman and Members of the Committee:

My name is Dr. Jonathan Madison, and I am a governance fellow at the R Street Institute, a nonprofit, nonpartisan public policy research organization. Our mission is to engage in policy analysis and outreach to promote free markets and limited, effective government in many areas, including election administration. This is why we have an interest in SB 132.

SB 132 makes a modest but important adjustment to Maryland’s existing primary election format by allowing unaffiliated voters to register with a party during the early voting period, rather than requiring that decision at the point of registration. This matters because several primary elections in Maryland essentially determine the eventual officeholder.<sup>1</sup> Yet nearly one million Maryland voters remain unaffiliated with a political party.<sup>2</sup> These voters pay taxes that fund primary elections—at a cost exceeding \$27 million statewide—while lacking a meaningful opportunity to participate unless they navigate advance registration requirements.<sup>3</sup> SB 132 ensures that unaffiliated voters who wish to take part in a party’s primary can do so by affiliating with a party without unnecessary procedural hurdles.

The bill does not force parties to open their primaries, nor does it alter Maryland’s existing primary structure. Instead, it offers a simple, administratively feasible way to expand access for voters who choose to engage, while respecting party autonomy. By reducing barriers at the

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<sup>1</sup> April Quevedo et al., “Maryland’s Top 5 Takeaways from the 2024 General Election,” *CNS Maryland*, November 6, 2024, <https://cnsmaryland.org/2024/11/06/marylands-top-5-takeaways-from-the-2024-general-election/>.

<sup>2</sup> *Maryland Board of Elections Voter Registration Activity Report* (2026), [https://elections.maryland.gov/pdf/vrar/MSR-2026\\_01.pdf](https://elections.maryland.gov/pdf/vrar/MSR-2026_01.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> *Taxpayer Funding: The Cost of Closed Primaries* (Open Primaries, 2022), <https://openprimaries.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Taxpayer-Funding-The-Cost-of-Closed-Primaries.pdf>.

point of early voting, SB 132 strengthens participation in the most consequential stage of many elections and better aligns Maryland's election system with principles of fairness and taxpayer accountability. For these reasons, we encourage a favorable report of SB 132.

Thank you,

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