

2026 GBCC SB 132 Unaffiliated Voters Support.pdf

Uploaded by: Ashlie Bagwell

Position: FAV



THE GREATER BETHESDA
CHAMBER of COMMERCE

Better business. Stronger community.

Testimony on behalf of the Greater Bethesda Chamber of Commerce

*In Support of
Senate Bill 132—Election Law—Affiliating With a Party and Voting—Unaffiliated Voters*

*February 11, 2026
Senate Education, Energy and the Environment Committee*

The Greater Bethesda Chamber of Commerce (GBCC) was founded in 1926. Since then, the organization has grown to more than 600 businesses located throughout the Greater Bethesda area and beyond. On behalf of these members, we appreciate the opportunity to provide written comments on Senate Bill 132—Election Law—Affiliating With a Party and Voting—Unaffiliated Voters.

Senate Bill 132 allows unaffiliated voters the ability to affiliate with a political party at an early voting center during a primary election for the purpose of voting. According to the Montgomery County Board of Elections, one quarter of Montgomery County residents are unaffiliated, all of whom choose not to affiliate for different reasons. This is common among some immigrant communities, where some reports suggest that as much as fifty percent of foreign-born voters do not identify with either political party. Others may simply choose to be unaffiliated to avoid the constraints of a political party. This bill would allow those unaffiliated Marylanders the ability to vote and have their voice heard in the primary election, thereby increasing overall voter turnout and encouraging broader civic engagement.

For these reasons, we would respectfully request a favorable vote on Senate Bill 132. Thank you for the opportunity to provide written comments.

SB 132 - Election Law – Affiliating with a Party a

Uploaded by: Ihemanma Ugo-Akwada

Position: FAV

February 9, 2026

**Testimony on SB 132
Election Law – Affiliating with a Party and Voting – Unaffiliated Voters
Energy, Education, and the Environment**

Position: Favorable

Common Cause Maryland supports SB 132 which would allow unaffiliated, registered voters to change their registration to a party during the early voting period.

Currently, registered but unaffiliated voters who would like to register under a recognized political party to participate in Maryland’s closed primary process must do so 21 days before the election. However, unregistered voters may show up in the week before the election, register, and choose a party affiliation.

This is no small problem in our state, where the number of unaffiliated voters has grown at a rapid pace over the past decade. State voter registration data from December 2023 shows that over 850,000 voters in Maryland are currently registered as unaffiliated. Many voters choose to register as unaffiliated in order to express their disapproval of the two major political parties, but few are aware that such a registration will affect their ability to fully participate in Maryland’s primaries.

While those hundreds of thousands of Marylanders can freely participate in the general election, they are unable to meaningfully participate in Maryland’s closed-primary system. And in a state where demographic realities and partisan gerrymandering basically guarantee many races to certain political parties, our current way of doing things leaves unaffiliated voters shut out of the most important election of the cycle.

SB 132 would allow for more voters to have a more meaningful impact on the democratic process in a way that would not materially impact the state’s current preference for closed primaries. For these reasons, we support SB 132 and urge a favorable report from the committee.

Testimony in support of MD SB132.pdf

Uploaded by: Morley Winograd

Position: FAV

Testimony in support of SB132, the "[Ballot Access](#)" bill sponsored by Sen. Cheryl Kagan

Maryland has an opportunity to take the lead this year in helping to improve participation in our nation's most important democratic process—voting—by passing SB132 as quickly as possible.

Maryland rightfully prides itself on having strong democratic values, good governance and broad citizen participation. Yet it currently prevents 984,920 unaffiliated ("Independent") voters, comprising more than 22 per cent of the state's voters, from voting in primary elections that choose which candidates will be nominated to represent their party's ideas and programs in the general election.

We can remedy this flaw in our system with the simple fix proposed in SB 132, the "[Ballot Access](#)" bill, sponsored by Sen. Cheryl Kagan. It would allow unaffiliated voters to join a party and complete a primary ballot so long as they do so during the state's Early Voting period. To be clear, this legislation only applies to those not affiliated with either party. Voters currently registered as either Democrats or Republicans would still need to change their affiliation 21 days in advance.

The need to allow almost one million Maryland voters to participate in every element of our voting system has never been more urgent. The unaffiliated portion of the electorate has been growing steadily. It has roughly doubled since [2000](#), when it was 12% of the electorate. This means that every year an increasing number of Marylanders express their faltering faith in our democratic institutions by declining to affiliate with either political party, thereby denying themselves an opportunity to determine the choices they will be presented with in the general election. This is not healthy for our state or for either political party. It is a trend which can and should be addressed without delay.

Expanding voter participation in our democracy doesn't weaken our party system. It strengthens it. Too many of our citizens today are expressing their growing mistrust of politics. We need to address their legitimate concerns by encouraging them to participate in all aspects of the process, not by denying them access to a major part of it.

Opening primaries will not weaken the quality of our general election candidates, it will strengthen it. The more representative primary voters are of the overall electorate, the more likely the winning candidates will understand and reflect the needs and concerns of all Marylanders. And the more likely they reflect what voters want, the better the odds that what we decide here in this body will help restore our citizen's faith in their democracy.

If we truly want a government that reflects the will of the people, lawmakers must be willing to update laws that do not serve the public interest. Expanding "Ballot Access" for unaffiliated voters would be a commonsense step toward a more inclusive and representative democracy. We urge you to vote yes on SB132.

Respectfully submitted by:

Dr. Mark Siegel, former Executive Director of the Democratic National Committee, and
Morley Winograd, Chairman of DNC Commission that reformed the Democratic Party's
presidential delegate selection rules

2-11LH NS SB 132 Ballot Access – Voter Registratio

Uploaded by: Nikki Tyree

Position: FAV



TESTIMONY TO THE SENATE EDUCATION, ENERGY, AND THE ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

SB 132 Ballot Access – Voter Registration – Affiliating With a Party

POSITION – Support

BY: Linda T. Kohn, President

Date: February 11, 2026

The League of Women Voters of the United States believes that democratic government depends upon informed and active citizen participation, and that voting is a fundamental citizen right that must be guaranteed by law. **SB 132** would allow unaffiliated voters (a voter who has registered to vote but declined to affiliate with a political party) to affiliate with a political party at an early voting center during a primary election and vote a provisional ballot for the voter's preferred political party.

As of December 2023, there were 887,739 unaffiliated voters in the state of Maryland. The majority of unaffiliated voters are new citizens, young voters, or first-time voters.

There are many reasons why people don't register with a party. They may not be aware that Maryland is a closed primary state, dramatically limiting the choices on their ballot. They may not be prepared to select a party when they show up to get a driver's license and find out they have been registered to vote. They may be excited about becoming a citizen and registering at a naturalization ceremony, but feel they don't know enough about the political parties to make a choice that day.

During every primary election, thousands of voters vote provisionally because they had no idea, when showing up at the polling place, that they could only vote in non-partisan elections.

During the primary election early voting period, these non-affiliated voters may have received information from party volunteers at the early voting site, and are now confident to make an informed decision to affiliate.

Since 2017, the League has been supporting legislation allowing unaffiliated voters the opportunity to choose a party at early voting or on election day because we already have mechanisms in place to register voters on those occasions. We appreciate that passage of SB 132 is progress towards our goal as it expands the window of opportunity for more Marylanders to exercise their right to vote in primary elections.

The LWVMD strongly urges a favorable report on **SB 132**.

Testimony in support of SB0132 - Election Law - Af

Uploaded by: Richard KAP Kaplowitz

Position: FAV

SB0132 RichardKaplowitz_FAV

02/11/2026

Richard Keith Kaplowitz

Frederick, MD 21703

TESTIMONY ON SB#/0132- POSITION: FAVORABLE

Election Law - Affiliating With a Party and Voting - Unaffiliated Voters

TO: Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and members of the Education, Energy and the Environment Committee

FROM: Richard Keith Kaplowitz

My name is Richard Keith Kaplowitz. I am a resident of District 3, Frederick County. I am submitting this testimony in support of SB#/0132, **Election Law - Affiliating With a Party and Voting - Unaffiliated Voters**

Issuelab.org has studied the problem in their article *Not Invited to the Party Primary – Independent Voters and the Problem with Closed Primaries*¹

More Americans than ever before — 43% — identify as independent voters. Meanwhile, only 27% each identify as Republicans and Democrats. Independent voters excluded from primaries (“Excluded Independents”) hold a diversity of political beliefs from across the ideological spectrum. Their perspectives call into question long-held beliefs that most independents are merely “weak partisans.” Independents believe their exclusion from primaries is unfair, support reforming the primary system, and would participate in primaries if allowed to do so.... However, they remain swing voters open to being persuaded.

We need to have EVERY voice heard in voting – this bill will facilitate that and recognize the issues around closed primary elections by authorizing unaffiliated voters to request to affiliate with a political party at an early voting center during a primary election and vote a provisional ballot for the voter's preferred political party; and requiring an election judge to determine whether the voter resides in the county in which the voter seeks to vote.

It is time to open the political processes to every voter in every incidence of voting.

I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report on SB#/0132.

¹ <https://search.issuelab.org/resources/43491/43491.pdf>

FINAL 2026 MD SB 132 Testimony - Jonathan Madison.

Uploaded by: Robert Melvin

Position: FAV



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Free Markets. Real Solutions.
www.rstreet.org

Testimony from:
Dr. Jonathan Madison, Governance Fellow, R Street Institute

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.¹ Yet nearly one million Maryland voters remain unaffiliated with a political party.² 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.³ 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

¹ 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/>.

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

³ *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,

Dr. Jonathan Madison
Governance Fellow
R Street Institute
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Sen. Kagan SB132 Testimony_ Ballot Access.pdf

Uploaded by: Sen. Cheryl Kagan

Position: FAV

CHERYL C. KAGAN
Legislative District 17
Montgomery County

Vice Chair
Education, Energy, and
the Environment Committee

Joint Audit and Evaluation Committee

Joint Committee on Federal Relations



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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

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.

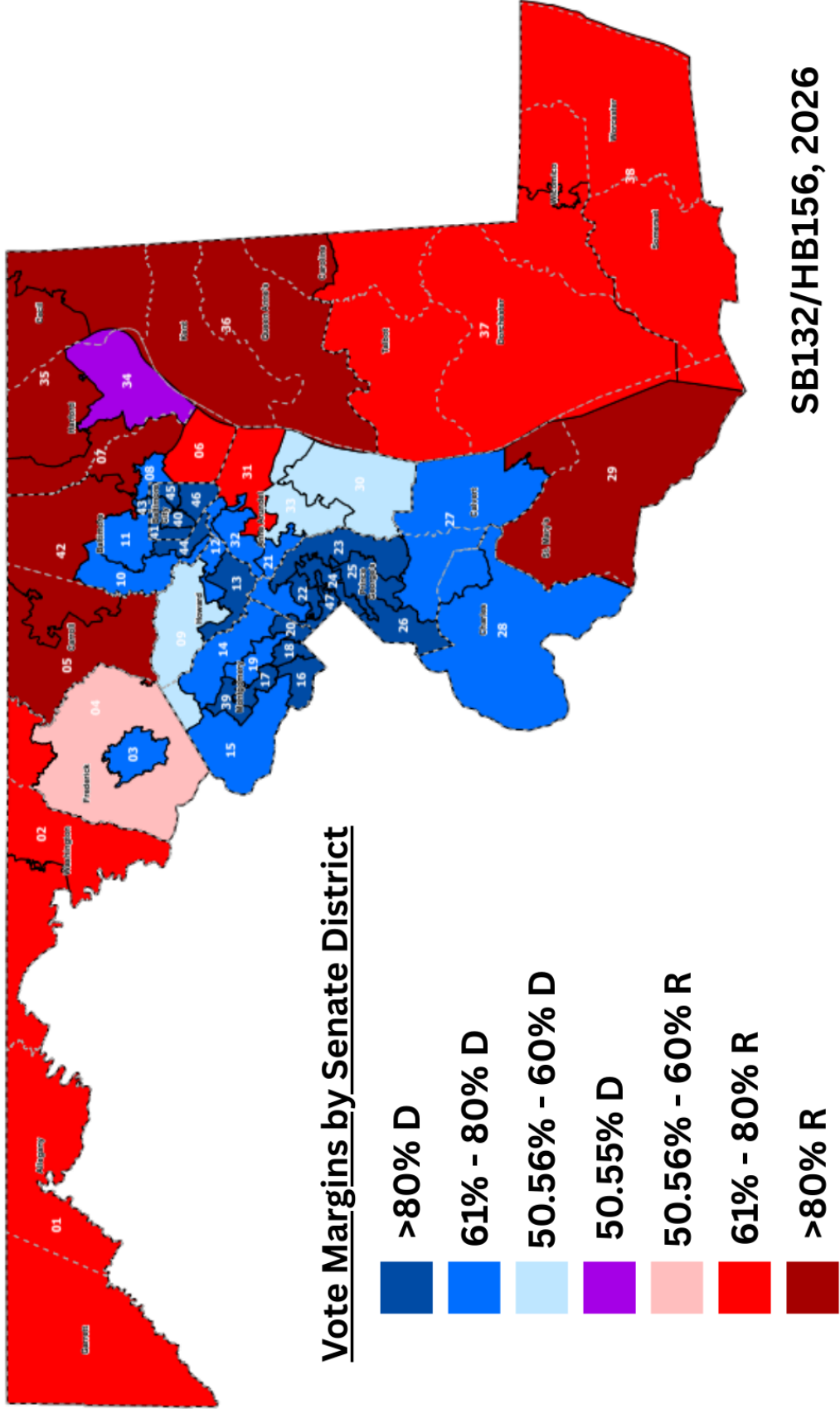
Please amend SB132 to an effective date of October 1, 2026. Our election officials need adequate lead time to update procedures and create marketing materials to ensure smooth and accurate implementation.

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

SB132_FWA_MDForwardParty_Final.pdf

Uploaded by: Leland Bradshaw

Position: FWA



MARYLAND FORWARD PARTY

Not Left. Not Right. Forward.

BILL NO: SB132

TITLE: Election Law - Affiliating With a Party and Voting - Unaffiliated Voters

COMMITTEE: Education, Energy and Environment

POSITION: FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS

DATE: February 9, 2026

TO: Chair Feldman and Vice Chair Kagan

FROM: Maryland Forward Party

SUBJECT: Supporting Increased Voter Participation (with Amendments)

Maryland Forward Party appreciates the intent of SB132 to expand participation for unaffiliated voters, who represent a large part of our growing coalition. However, the bill remains restrictive in its current form, and we **urge an amendment to SB132** to address these barriers.

As drafted, the bill would allow unaffiliated voters to affiliate with a party and vote only by provisional ballot at an early voting center. This creates unnecessary barriers and uncertainty for voters and election administrators alike.

Maryland's growing unaffiliated electorate deserves a clear and consistent path to participation. We **recommend amending SB132 to align with the framework of HB0496**, which allows unaffiliated voters to choose a party ballot without being forced into permanent partisan affiliation. Additionally, this supports administrative efficiency by reducing the burden on election judges to manually process and verify provisional ballots.

Maryland Forward Party believes reforms should prioritize voter access and administrative efficiency. We thank the sponsor for this initiative and urge a report of **FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS** on SB132.

Sincerely,

Lee Bradshaw

Legislative Committee Chair

Maryland Forward Party

SB0132 Unaffiliated Voting in the Primary 2-09-26.

Uploaded by: Mary Nelson

Position: UNF

Witness: Mary Nelson mgn136@gmail.com 443-485-0255
Jurisdiction: Cecil County

SB0132 Election Law - Affiliating With a Party and Voting - Unaffiliated Voters

UNFAVORABLE

We have a two-party system. If voters want to support a particular candidate they need to join that party before the stated deadline prior to each election. Allowing unaffiliated voters to decide the day of early voting creates an atmosphere where a person can be bullied or forced into voting one way. Either voters espouse the platform of the Republican or Democrat Party and register accordingly or they wait until the election in November to express their choice. unaffiliated means unaffiliated to a party and not involved in either party's choice of a candidate in a primary.

I request an UNFAVORABLE vote.