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**TESTIMONY ON HB#/0496- POSITION: FAVORABLE**

**Election Law - Unaffiliated Voters - Open Primary Elections**

**TO:** Chair Wells, Vice Chair Kerr, and members of the Government, Labor and Elections 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 HB#/0496, **Election Law - Unaffiliated Voters - Open Primary Elections**

Maryland uses a closed primary system for all partisan offices. All closed primaries are partisan, meaning Democrats and Republicans each hold a separate primary election to determine their nominees for the general election. In a closed primary system, only registered members of a political party are permitted to vote in that party's primary. To participate, voters must declare their party affiliation by a deadline set by the state government before the primary election. Closed primaries are publicly funded, meaning that all taxpayers, regardless of their party registration, play a part in footing the bill for these elections. <sup>1</sup>

This bill says that it is wrong and making taxpayers who are not a member of a party lose a chance to vote holds down voter participation in our democracy. It says we should let people have a vote without permanently joining one or another party.

The impact of closed primaries on independents is further illustrated in a [new report](#) produced by the Unite America Institute, "Not Invited to the Party Primary: Independent Voters and the Problem with Closed Primaries." <sup>2</sup>

The bill will authorize a voter unaffiliated with a political party to vote the ballot for unaffiliated voters or the ballot of the political party of the voter's choice in a primary election; and prohibiting a voter unaffiliated with a political party who votes the ballot of a political party in a primary election from automatically becoming affiliated with the political party whose ballot the voter voted.

**I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report on HB#/0496.**

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.uniteamerica.org/articles/what-is-a-closed-primary>

<sup>2</sup> <https://docsend.com/view/kz8jkfxixy727fds>