



TESTIMONY TO THE GOVERNMENT, LABOR, AND ELECTIONS COMMITTEE

HB 44 Election Law – Petitions and Ballot Questions – Contents, Plain Language Requirement, and Procedures

POSITION – Favorable

BY: Linda T. Kohn, President

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The League of Women Voters of Maryland believes that elections should be feasible to implement, increase voter participation, and be equitable and accessible.

HB 44 is a necessary and long-overdue bill that would require all petitions and ballot questions to be posted and written to voters in plain language. It would also limit how the questions can be written, avoiding specific techniques that could confuse the reader. Furthermore, it would require that voters be told what the outcome of voting a certain way would mean.

Too often, LWVMD has been called upon to answer the most common question: What is this ballot question saying, and what will it do? In 2022, there was a ballot initiative on Howard County's Orphan Court. Not only did the questions, as written, confuse voters, but LWVMD was inundated with people who did not understand how voting yes or no would actually impact Howard County. Had HB 44 been law at that time, voters would have been given clear, concise language about what a vote for or against would mean for people in Howard County.

In every election, voters go to the polls and skip voting on ballot questions because they do not understand them or fear that if they do vote on them, they will vote "wrong." Some voters do their best to read the question and vote, but then are dismayed to learn after the fact what their vote actually means. HB 44 would prevent this confusion.

LWVMD would ask that the State Board of Elections be provided with a reasonable budget to publicize this new initiative and alert Maryland voters that it is now available.

LWVMD urges a favorable report on HB 44.