

**Testimony of Elaina Goldstein
Independent Voters of Maryland
Before the House Committee Government, Labor and Elections
In Favor of HB 496 - Unaffiliated Voters - Open Primaries
Wednesday, February 11, 2026**

Good afternoon, Madam Chairwoman, Mr. Vice Chairman, and members of the Committee. My name is Elaina Goldstein and, two months ago today, I became a Marylander when I relocated to Baltimore City from Providence, Rhode Island. I'm a long time member of the Open Primaries organization and a new member of Independent Voters of Maryland.

Moving from RI this winter, I missed the massive 22 inch snow storm that hit Providence a few weeks ago. More significantly, because Maryland is currently one of the 14 "closed primary" states I will no longer have the right to vote in primaries. Trust me, I will miss losing my right to vote much more than the snow. By simply moving from a semi-open primary state to a closed primary state I will be barred, as an Independent American citizen, from voting in the most critical stage of our election process, the primaries. That is, unless you pass HB 496.

House Bill 496, would provide me as a new Unaffiliated Maryland voter the same rights I had just two months ago as an Unaffiliated Rhode Island voter. I would be voting in a Semi- Open Primary state on June 23, 2026, I would go to the polls and vote in Maryland's primaries with registered Democrats and Republicans. As a registered Unaffiliated voter I would request a Democrat or Republican ballot, cast my vote and, I would remain an Unaffiliated / independent voter in Maryland.

In a [recent Gallup poll](#), it found that 45% of Americans now identify as Independents. In fact, 56% of today's Gen Z voters reject the two party labels entirely. Checking the January 2026, Maryland voter registration Democrats still hold the majority at 51.5% but, the Unaffiliates are neck and neck with Republicans, 23.1% vs 23.8% respectfully.

I'd like to take this time to thank Delegate Qi and Delegate Schmidt for introducing HB 496. I know that Delegates Fair, Ruth, and Wu have introduced HB 156. The significant difference between Delegate Qi and Schmidt's bi-partisan bill and HB 156 is that they respect that Independent voters aren't what establishment insiders dismiss as 'confused leaners'. We have a distinct identity. For many of us, we are tired of the two parties one-upping each other every election cycle. Either by gerrymandering districts in the state

or creating meaner negative or false ads against one another. By selecting party loyalty over prioritizing finding solutions to the difficult situations Americans are facing today.

I do not lean Democrat or Republican. I reject what the two parties have become. I am an Independent voter who values candidates who want to work across party lines and find solutions to the problems our country is facing. What does it say about our democracy when Maryland and 1 other states with closed primaries are excluding a significant percentage of their citizens, potentially 45%, from their right to vote in primary elections? I implore the members of this Committee to have the courage to help bring the light of democracy back to all Marylanders and pass HB 496 out of Committee.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify in favor of HB 496- Unaffiliated Voters –Open Primaries