

House Bill 496  
FAV

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Madame Chair, Mr. Vice Chair, my name is Jim Macgill. I live just outside Bel Air in Harford County. I am not affiliated with any organization. I am here to support House Bill 496 because I am concerned about the state of our democracy.

House Bill 496 takes a key step toward increasing voter participation in primary elections in Maryland. At a time when our democracy is under stress, it is important that as many voters as possible participate in the electoral process, and that a diversity of viewpoints be heard by elected officials. Unfortunately, in this state, the closed primary system reduces participation and requires unaffiliated voters to register with a political party to vote on primary day. This results in a smaller, narrower electorate selecting candidates. It also results in alienation from the democratic process by many people. We can strengthen and protect our democracy if we allow more voters to participate in primaries.

House Bill 496 will make it easier for unaffiliated voters to vote on primary election day. If enacted, it is likely to increase voter turnout in Maryland primaries. Research has shown that states with open or non-partisan primaries have a greater percentage of registered voters turning out than states with close primaries. In particular, the percentage of voters who are likely to vote increases significantly in the 18-34 age group ([Can nonpartisan primaries boost turnout and lessen demographic disparities? | PLOS One](#)).

House Bill 496 also responds to the fact that Maryland's electorate is shifting. As of November 2024, 21.59% of eligible Maryland voters registered as unaffiliated, and more recent data show that this percentage is continuing to grow. In 2024, more than 25% of the voters in Howard, Frederick and Anne Arundel Counties were already registered as unaffiliated, and Calvert, Carroll, Cecil, Montgomery, St. Mary's and Washington Counties are not far behind (Source Maryland Board of Elections, [Eligible Active Voters by County - PG24](#)). House Bill 496 helps assure that these unaffiliated voters will not become alienated voters, and that when democracy is under attack, they will have a stake in defending it.

For these reasons, I urge a favorable report by the Committee on House Bill 496.