

Testimony in Support of House Bill 496

Election Law – Unaffiliated Voters – Open Primary Elections

Testimony to the Government, Labor, and Elections Committee of the Maryland House of Delegates

February 11, 2026

Chair Wells, Vice-Chair Kerr, and members of the Committee:

My name is John Hammond, and I reside at 141 Monticello Avenue in Annapolis, Maryland. I am writing to express my strong support for House Bill 496, which seeks to grant unaffiliated voters the right to participate in primary elections. In an era marked by growing political partisanship, it is encouraging to see bipartisan backing for this proposal, which would significantly increase voter participation in our state's primary elections. Expanding opportunities for voters has been a defining part of America's electoral history since the adoption of the Constitution, and I consider this legislation to be an important and long-needed step forward in that tradition.

As an Advisory Board member of Annapolitans for a Better Community, I have collaborated with other residents to reform the City of Annapolis election code, aiming to allow unaffiliated voters, more than one-quarter of the registered voters, to take part in the City's primary elections. Over the past year, our group initiated a petition process to accomplish this change. However, we were unable to fulfill the demanding signature requirements of the City Code's petition process in time for the 2025 City election.

In addition to my current community involvement, I am a former Annapolis Alderman, having served four terms from 1977 to 1993. I continue to stay engaged in Annapolis's political affairs. As a native Annapolitan, I have witnessed an increase in political partisanship, even at the local government level, where such divisions should ideally play a minimal role given the practical nature of municipal issues. Allowing unaffiliated voters to participate in the primary process would foster broader representation and attract a more diverse range of voters. I believe this reform has the potential to reduce the current trend toward polarization at all levels of government.

I wish to thank Delegate Qi and Delegate Schmidt (a fellow Anne Arundel countian) for their sponsorship of HB496, and I trust that this committee will recommend the legislation favorably, enabling a positive vote in both the House and Senate.

Thank you for your attention.

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