

Written Testimony in Support of HB708 (2026)

Requiring voter registration for municipal elections and limiting registration to United States citizens

Position: FAVORABLE

Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Kate Sullivan and I respectfully submit this testimony in strong support of House Bill 708.

HB708 establishes a clear statewide requirement that municipal elections use voter registration systems and that only United States citizens may register to vote in those elections. This legislation strengthens election clarity, protects the integrity of citizenship, and prevents avoidable legal confusion.

1. Citizenship has always been the constitutional foundation of voting rights in national elections — and the same principle should apply locally

Under federal law and longstanding constitutional practice, participation in federal elections is limited to United States citizens. This restriction exists for an important reason: voting is one of the defining rights and responsibilities of citizenship.

The American constitutional system was built on the idea that political authority flows from the people who form the nation — its citizens. While states historically control election administration, the core concept that citizenship carries political membership in the republic has remained constant since the founding.

Allowing non-citizens to vote in municipal elections weakens this foundational distinction between citizenship and non-citizenship. Voting is not merely a local administrative function; it is an exercise of sovereign political power.

HB708 restores clarity by affirming that the right to vote in Maryland elections — including municipal elections — is tied to citizenship status, consistent with the broader constitutional tradition of the United States.

Maintaining this principle respects the structure envisioned by the nation's founders and preserves the meaning and value of citizenship in our democratic system.

2. Allowing non-citizen municipal voting creates real legal confusion and risk for immigrants

A second, often overlooked concern is the serious legal risk created when jurisdictions allow non-citizens to vote in certain elections but prohibit them from voting in others.

Under federal law, it is a criminal offense for a non-citizen to vote in a federal election. Even an accidental or misunderstood attempt to vote in a federal race can carry severe immigration consequences, including potential barriers to naturalization.

When municipal elections allow non-citizen participation while federal elections strictly prohibit it, the result is a confusing patchwork that can easily mislead individuals unfamiliar with the complexity of American election law.

HB708 removes this ambiguity by establishing a clear, uniform rule: voting eligibility in Maryland elections requires citizenship. This clarity protects not only election administration but also the legal security of immigrants who may otherwise unintentionally place their future citizenship status at risk.

In this sense, the bill functions as both an election integrity measure and a safeguard against preventable legal harm.

Conclusion

HB708 promotes consistency, clarity, and respect for the role of citizenship in democratic participation. By ensuring that municipal elections follow the same fundamental eligibility principle recognized in federal elections, the bill strengthens both election administration and public understanding of voting law.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to issue a **favorable report on HB708**.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,
Kate Sullivan
SecuretheVoteMD