

Andy Ellis

Seeking the Green Party nomination for Governor

HB 496

FAV

According to the Maryland State Board of Elections' January 2026 Voter Registration Activity Report, Maryland is home to 990,608 unaffiliated voters -- residents who have chosen not to register with either major party. That is nearly one million people, roughly one in four active registered voters in the state. Under our current system, these voters are locked out of the primary elections that often determine the outcome of general elections, particularly in jurisdictions dominated by one party. In a state where the Democratic or Republican primary frequently functions as the de facto general election, unaffiliated voters are faced with a choice: associate with a party against their will or forfeit participation in the elections that determine the outcome.

This is not a shrinking population. In January 2026 alone, more than 36% of all new voter registrations in Maryland were unaffiliated -- the fastest-growing segment of our electorate by a wide margin.

HB0496 addresses this by allowing unaffiliated voters to vote either an unaffiliated ballot or the ballot of the political party of their choice in a primary election, without being automatically affiliated with that party. This is a straightforward expansion of voter access that strengthens Maryland's democracy without imposing undue burdens on voters, or restructuring the primary process entirely.

Elected leaders are less responsive to voters when the most consequential elections -- the primaries -- are closed to a large segment of the electorate. When nearly one in four active registered voters cannot participate in the election that functionally selects their representatives, we have a participation crisis.

Maryland is a multiparty state. I am a voter affiliated with the Green Party. This bill would not permit me to vote in the Democratic primary (unless the Democratic Party decided to allow members associated with other parties to vote in their primary). That is part of the valuable balance this bill strikes. It permits voters unaffiliated with a party to vote in a partisan election, but not members of other parties. That is the right balance.

This bill is a step toward a more inclusive democracy -- one where the rules encourage participation rather than restrict it. It aligns with broader efforts to modernize Maryland's elections, including ranked choice voting, public campaign financing, and ballot access reform.

I encourage this committee to provide a favorable report on HB0496.

