



February 4, 2026

The Honorable Members of the House Government, Labor, and Elections Committee

People on the Go Maryland

House Bill 44 Election Law Petitions and Ballot Questions Contents, Plain Language Requirement, and Procedures

POSITION: FAVORABLE

Honorable Chairperson and Distinguished Committee Members:

People on the Go Maryland is the statewide self-advocacy and systems advocacy organization run for and by those with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities. Our mission is promoting advocacy and civil rights throughout the state. We write today in strong support of House Bill 44, sponsored by Delegate Feldmark, and request this Committee to issue a favorable report.

Why House Bill 44 Matters to Marylanders with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

Voting is a fundamental civil right, yet for decades, Marylanders with intellectual and or developmental disabilities have faced a persistent and unnecessary barrier at the ballot box: confusing, jargon-filled language in ballot questions that makes it nearly impossible to understand what we are voting for or against. House Bill 44 addresses this barrier directly by requiring that all ballot questions and petition language be written in plain, clear language that voters can easily understand.

The bill's specific requirements will transform ballot accessibility for our community. By prohibiting legal jargon, double negatives, and passive voice, HB 44 ensures that ballot questions are written in the straightforward language that all voters regardless of cognitive ability deserve. When ballot language asks voters to consider whether to "not disapprove" of a measure, or buries the actual impact in complex legal terminology, it effectively disenfranchises people with intellectual disabilities who have every right to participate fully in Maryland's democracy.

Key Provisions That Promote Equal Access to Voting

1. **Practical Outcome Explanations:** HB 44 requires a brief statement explaining what the practical outcome of each voting choice would be. This is transformative for voters with intellectual disabilities. Instead of trying to decipher/ figure out legal mechanisms, we will be able to understand the real-world consequences of voting "yes" or "no" information essential for making informed decisions about issues that affect our lives.
2. **Extended Review Periods:** The bill extends the posting period for complete ballot question text from 65 to 90 days before an election. This additional time is critical for voters with developmental disabilities and their support networks. Understanding complex policy questions often requires more time for discussion, clarification, and thoughtful consideration. The extended timeline respects the different ways people process information and makes space for meaningful civic engagement.
3. **Structured Information Format:** By requiring each ballot question to include a brief title, a condensed statement in plain language, clear explanation of voting choices, and practical outcome statements, HB 44 creates a predictable structure that supports comprehension for voters with cognitive disabilities. Consistency in format reduces confusion and helps voters know what to expect.
4. **Public Comment Period:** The 15-day public comment period for ballot question language creates an invaluable opportunity for disability advocacy organizations like ours to review proposed language and provide feedback before it is finalized. This ensures that the voices of people with intellectual disabilities are heard in the process of crafting/ writing accessible ballot language.

A Civil Rights Issue

Make no mistake: accessible ballot language is a civil rights issue. When ballot questions are written in language that only lawyers and policy experts can understand, voters with intellectual and or developmental disabilities are effectively excluded from participating in decisions about education funding, healthcare policy, transportation infrastructure, and countless other issues that directly impact our lives. House Bill 44 recognizes that equal access to voting means more than physical access to polling places it means cognitive access to the ballot itself.

By referencing the Federal Plain Writing Act of 2010 as guidance, HB 44 aligns Maryland with federal accessibility standards and reflects a nationwide movement toward clearer government communication. Plain language is not "dumbing down" content it is respecting the diverse ways that citizens process information and ensuring that government is accessible to the people it serves.

Benefits Beyond the Disability Community

While we speak from the perspective of the intellectual and or developmental disability community, we recognize that HB 44 will benefit all Marylanders. Seniors, people with limited English proficiency, those with lower literacy levels, and even highly educated voters who simply want to understand their ballot without consulting a law dictionary all will benefit from clearer, more accessible ballot language. When ballot questions are easy to understand, voter confidence increases, and democracy is strengthened.

Our Request

For too long, complex ballot language has silenced voters with intellectual and or developmental disabilities. House Bill 44 gives us back our voice. It affirms that we have the right not just to cast a ballot, but to understand what we are voting for. It recognizes that accessible language is not a special accommodation, it is a basic requirement of inclusive democracy.

We thank Delegate Feldmark for sponsoring this important legislation, and we thank this Committee for your time and consideration. On behalf of Marylanders with intellectual and or developmental disabilities across the state, People on the Go Maryland respectfully request a favorable report on House Bill 44.

Respectfully submitted,

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