



**Empowering People to Lead Systemic Change**

The Protection and Advocacy System for the State of Maryland

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**HOUSE GOVERNMENT, LABOR, ELECTIONS COMMITTEE**

**April 1, 2026**

**Senate Bill 29: Election Law - Petitions and Ballot Questions -  
Contents, Plain Language Requirement, and Procedures  
Position: SUPPORT**

Disability Rights Maryland (DRM) is the Protection & Advocacy agency in Maryland, federally mandated to advance the civil rights of people with disabilities. DRM works to expand opportunities for Marylanders with disabilities to fully participate in their communities through voting.

DRM strongly supports Senate Bill 29, which would require ballot questions and initiatives to include plain language summaries and clear explanatory statements, making ballot measures easier for voters to understand before casting their votes. This change is imperative to strengthening democracy in Maryland. Voters cannot meaningfully participate in the voting process without understanding what they are voting on.

Research shows that complex or technical language can be difficult for voters to understand.<sup>1</sup> A study conducted by Hofstra University found that providing voters with less legalistic language and additional information regarding a proposed ballot measure or question makes the voting process easier to understand for all voters.<sup>2</sup> Further, voters have shared that complex and difficult to understand language influences voting choices. In particular, language that is easier to understand is more likely to receive support, while language that is challenging to comprehend is more likely to be opposed or not chosen.<sup>3</sup> By providing a plain language description of the question being

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<sup>1</sup><https://www.thecampaignworkshop.com/blog/ballot-initiatives-and-ballot-measures/ballot-language>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0261379417301889?via%3Dihub>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10584609.2022.2092920#abstract>

put forth, voters will feel more empowered and confident in their decisions throughout the selection process.

A 2023 analysis conducted by Ballotpedia found that many ballot measures require a graduate-level reading ability to understand.<sup>4</sup> This level of complexity can pose challenges for the average voter and creates particular barriers for individuals with many disabilities, including those with intellectual disabilities and those who experience cognitive symptoms such as brain fog from chronic illness. SB 29 aims to align Maryland with the principles of the Plain Writing Act of 2010 by requiring ballot language to be written in plain, accessible language, helping ensure it can be understood by a broad range of voters. SB 29 helps address barriers that arise due to the often confusing and legalistic language of ballot questions and initiatives by requiring clear, plain language explanations to help voters better understand what they are asked to decide. By improving voters' understanding of these measures, the bill supports informed decision-making and strengthens the democratic process across the state.

DRM is available, should the State Board of Elections need technical assistance, guidance or resources in providing support with the establishment of the proposed guidelines.

**For these reasons, we urge a favorable report on SB 29.**

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2024/06/plain-language-ballot-measures-disability/>