



**TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE GOVERNMENT, LABOR, AND ELECTIONS
COMMITTEE**

HB 1265 Election Law – Candidate Truthfulness - Oath

POSITION: Favorable

By: Linda Kohn, President

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The League of Women Voters of Maryland (LWVMD) supports an open, representative, and accountable government that is based on informed citizen participation. Voters look to the League for non-partisan information through our voters' guides that includes verbatim responses to questions that we ask of all candidates.

Through the Joint Committee on Legislative Ethics, the Maryland General Assembly produces an Ethics Guide that includes a section on disclosures pertaining to elected officials and staff. However, such a document does not exist at the candidate level.

HB 1265 provides that ethical disclosures be made before the campaign begins in the form of an "optional" oath affirming truthfulness by a prospective candidate. The oath does not prohibit a candidate from embellishing or editorializing nonfactual opinions or information, including personal information. The candidate may be subject to charges of perjury, disqualification of candidacy, or removal from office if false information is deliberately disseminated.

If a candidate were to opt out of signing the oath, that would become a public record and subject to public disclosure.

In today's world when there are serious concerns about mis- and disinformation, any effort that can attempt to moderate this should be tried. Intentionally misleading information interferes with a voter's ability to make informed decisions and erodes trust in our elections.

HB 1265 is an attempt to ensure that similar truthfulness standards apply to candidates as they would if elected.

For these reasons, the League urges a favorable report on HB 1265.