



TESTIMONY FOR HB0496

Election Law – Unaffiliated Voters – Open Primary Elections – FAV

Bill Sponsor: Delegate Qi

Committee: House Government, Labor, and Elections

Organization Submitting: Maryland Legislative Coalition

Person Submitting: Aileen Alex, Cochair

Position: FAVORABLE

I am submitting this testimony in support of HB0496 on behalf of the Maryland Legislative Coalition. We are an association of unpaid citizen advocates—individuals and grassroots groups in every district across the state—representing and supporting more than 30,000 Marylanders.

HB0496 updates Maryland’s primary election system by allowing unaffiliated voters to participate in party primaries without changing their voter registration. Under this bill, an unaffiliated voter may request either an unaffiliated ballot or the ballot of any political party during a primary election.

Unaffiliated voters are one of the fastest-growing segments of our electorate, and many are new or younger voters who do not make affiliation decisions in advance. When these voters are shut out of primaries, they lose meaningful influence in the races that shape their communities. By broadening participation, HB0496 strengthens the legitimacy and representativeness of our elections and encourages lifelong civic engagement.

HB0496 directly supports the mission of the Maryland Legislative Coalition. We work to not only to provide everyday citizens access to the legislative process, we also provide important information about legislators voting records. This bill reflects the values we champion: openness, inclusion, and a democracy that welcomes participation rather than restricting it. For these reasons, we respectfully urge a **FAVORABLE** report on HB0496.