

Good afternoon, Chair Wells, Vice Chair Kerr, and members of the Committee,

My name is Will Andrione, and I am here today in strong support of HB0496, a bill that will allow unaffiliated voters in Maryland to choose a primary ballot without being forced to change their political affiliation.

As I mentioned before, my name is Will Andrione. I am a senior at Severna Park High School, I am a registered Democrat, and I am so excited to vote for the first time this June.

Yet many of my peers and others won't be able to enjoy it.

Politics in 2026, especially at the federal level, is extremely divisive; that's nothing new. Because of this divisiveness, it forces many prospective voters and individuals new to politics away from both parties.

Simply because they don't wish to align with either party's platform of rhetoric fully does not mean that they should be restricted from voicing their opinion in that party's future.

I've seen moments like this firsthand. While serving as an election judge in the 2024 primary, I ran into a lot of unaffiliated voters. Far too many times, they had issues. Why couldn't they vote for a primary candidate in the Senate, or for the Presidency? Why were they limited to the Board of Education?

The answer was the same every time, because Maryland is a closed primary, and you cannot vote for partisan positions unless you are politically aligned with that party.

It should not have to be this way. Voting is for many people the only way they express what they want to see in government, and being restricted in their voting for half of the elections is extremely souring for many.

When we see new voters coming in, who aren't quite sure what party they align with yet, we shouldn't be restricting their partisan vote, but encouraging it, as encouraging votes early on creates a lifelong engaged voter.

Voting isn't a privilege, it's a right, and honestly, it's a responsibility. By moving Maryland to an open primary, we strengthen that right and enfranchise and encourage our over 900,000 unaffiliated voters.

For those reasons and more, I encourage a favorable report for HB0496.

Thank you.