



## MARYLAND LEGISLATIVE LATINO CAUCUS

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TO: Delegate Melissa Wells, Chair  
Delegate Kenneth Kerr, Vice Chair  
Government, Labor, and Elections Committee Members  
FROM: Maryland Legislative Latino Caucus  
DATE: 2/11/2026  
RE: HB0496 - Election Law - Unaffiliated Voters - Open Primary Elections

### **The MLLC supports HB0496 - Election Law - Unaffiliated Voters - Open Primary Elections**

The MLLC is a bipartisan group of Senators and Delegates committed to supporting legislation that improves the lives of Latinos throughout our state. The MLLC is a crucial voice in the development of public policy that uplifts the Latino community and benefits the state of Maryland. Thank you for allowing us the opportunity to express our support of HB0496.

Maryland currently operates under a closed primary system, which restricts participation in party primary elections to voters who are not officially affiliated with a recognized political party. In 2025 there was a record-high 45% of U.S. adults who identified as independent or unaffiliated.<sup>1</sup> In Maryland specifically there are almost a million unaffiliated voters.<sup>2</sup> These unaffiliated voters are restricted from participating in a critical stage of the democratic process. Unaffiliated voters are disproportionately new American citizens and members of marginalized communities, including Latino voters. Nationwide there are over 18 million eligible Latino voters who are unaffiliated or independent, i.e., 52% of the Hispanic/Latino population are independent.<sup>3</sup>

By authorizing unaffiliated voters to participate in primary elections, voter turnout often increases and marginalized communities are better represented.<sup>4</sup> By establishing open primary elections in Maryland, this legislation would not require Maryland voters to pledge their allegiance to one political party whose views they do not totally agree with. This is particularly pertinent to Maryland minority communities, specifically Latino communities, who may feel as though neither political party has served them particularly well. By allowing these communities to still participate in primaries while being unaffiliated, this bill would expand participation in the Maryland democratic process. Furthermore, as the number of all unaffiliated voters increases, who are disproportionately Latino, open primaries would help allow these voters to feel better represented.

For these reasons, the Maryland Legislative Latino Caucus respectfully requests a favorable report on HB0496.

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<sup>1</sup> [New High of 45% in U.S. Identify as Political Independents](#)

<sup>2</sup> [DARS-Complaint-FINAL.pdf](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Open Primaries Fact Sheet1.pdf - Google Drive](#)

<sup>4</sup> [The Effect of Open Primaries on Turnout and Representation](#)