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**HB979- State Constitution Convention – Question on Ballot Passage
by Majority of Votes Cast
Rules and Executive Nominations Committee
March 9th, 2026**

Unfavorable

Thank you, Chair Healey, Vice-Chair Holmes, and members of the Rules and Executive Nominations Committee, for the opportunity for AFSCME to submit testimony in strong opposition to HB979.

HB979 would change the threshold required for voters to approve a constitutional convention in Maryland by allowing approval based only on the majority of votes cast on the question, rather than a majority of all voters participating in the election. This change would significantly lower the standard required to initiate a constitutional convention and could allow such a consequential decision to be made without broad support from Maryland voters.

Maryland’s Constitution is the foundation of our state government and the rights of its citizens. Decisions about whether to open the Constitution for potential revision should require a strong, clear consensus among the electorate. The current standard helps ensure that a constitutional convention cannot be initiated unless a majority of all voters participating in the election support that action. This safeguard reflects the seriousness of potentially rewriting the fundamental governing document of our state.

Under HB979, the threshold would shift so that only those who vote on the ballot question are counted. In practice, many voters skip ballot questions, especially those that appear further down the ballot or that involve complex constitutional matters. As a result, a constitutional convention could be triggered by a relatively small portion of the overall electorate. This would allow a small minority of voters to initiate a process that could lead to sweeping constitutional changes affecting every resident of Maryland.

A constitutional convention is not a minor procedural step. Once convened, it could propose changes to major elements of Maryland’s constitutional framework, including the structure of government, individual rights, election procedures, and taxation authority. While any proposed changes may ultimately return to voters for approval,



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the decision to begin such a wide-ranging process should only occur when there is clear and broad support from the people of Maryland.

Additionally, maintaining a higher threshold helps protect against rushed or poorly understood ballot questions, producing unintended consequences. The current requirement encourages voter awareness and engagement by ensuring that the decision reflects the will of the broader electorate rather than a smaller group of voters who happened to vote on the question.

For these reasons, I believe the existing standard provides an important safeguard for the stability of Maryland's constitutional system. Lowering that standard through HB979 risks weakening that protection and allowing a constitutional convention to proceed without sufficient public consensus.

Therefore, I respectfully urge the committee to give HB979 an unfavorable report.