



MARYLAND FORWARD PARTY

Not Left. Not Right. Forward.

BILL NO: HB0979

TITLE: State Constitutional Convention – Question on Ballot – Passage by Majority of Votes Cast

COMMITTEE: Rules and Executive Nominations

POSITION: FAVORABLE

DATE: March 5, 2026

TO: Chair Healey, Vice Chair Holmes, and Members of the Committee

FROM: Maryland Forward Party

SUBJECT: Treat Abstentions As Abstentions

Maryland Forward Party **supports HB0979** because it aligns the results of questions on whether to have a state Constitutional Convention with the reasonable expectation of voters and with the majority of other states with Constitutional structures similar to Maryland's.

Under current law—which HB0979 seeks to correct—voters who do not participate in the question of a Constitutional Convention are treated as *de facto* “no” votes. But that treatment does not necessarily reflect the voter’s actual preference or expectation. It is well documented that some voters simply do not complete full ballots but instead only vote for the top-line races.¹ According to one survey on the issue, 80% of these “roll-off” voters said they did not vote their entire ballot because they did not feel that they understood enough about the down-ballot races to vote.² In other words, these voters had no position at all on the questions and races that they declined to vote for. Counting these “roll-off” votes as abstentions, rather than as “no” votes better reflects the actual preference and reasonable expectations of these voters.

HB0979 also aligns Maryland with its sister states. According to the most recent data available from the Council of State Governments,³ of the 14 states that have periodic requirements for Constitutional Convention ballot questions, Maryland is one of only two states that considers the vote totals of all citizens voting in the election. The remaining 12 states all consider only the number of votes on the proposal itself, as Maryland would under HB0979. There is no reason for Maryland to be in the minority on this issue.

¹ See, e.g., Zach Montellaro, POLITICO, Some voters skip down-ballot elections entirely. Are they the key to victory in November?, <https://www.politico.com/newsletters/weekly-score/2024/04/22/Some-voters-skip-down-ballot-Elections-entirely-are-they-the-key-to-victory-in-november-00153543> (April 22, 2024).

² Id.

³ <https://bookofthestates.org/tables/2022-1-6/> (Last Visited March 5, 2026).



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We urge the Committee to provide a FAVORABLE report on HB0979.

Sincerely,
Lee Bradshaw
Legislative Committee Chair
Maryland Forward Party