LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS® OF MARYLAND

**TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE**

**HB306 Circuit Court Judges – Nonpartisan General Elections**

**POSITION: Favorable**

**BY: Nancy Soreng – President**

**Date: February 16, 2022**

The League of Women Voters of Maryland supports HB 306 which would change the way Circuit Court judges are elected from a partisan to a nonpartisan process by having them appear on the General election ballot only where all voters can vote for them.

The election of Judges should not be partisan as it conflicts with their duty to remain impartial. Having them run on both the Democratic and Republican primary ballot as is currently the practice politicizes a nonpartisan race, negates the nonpartisan nature of the office, and excludes unaffiliated voters (currently 20 percent of voters statewide) and those registered with other parties (currently one percent of voters statewide) from voting for them. The number of unaffiliated voters continues to increase and includes many immigrants and new voters who are disenfranchised by the current practice.

The League of Women Voters of Maryland has long supported the elimination of partisan election of judges of the Circuit Court. Having the nonpartisan Circuit Court judgesrun in only the general election allows all voters an opportunity to learn about the candidates and vote for them Although partisan advocacy is appropriate for policy-making positions such as the General Assembly and Governor, a nonpartisan approach is essential for a fair judicial process. No person on trial should have concern that the judge in their case will be tempted to consider how any ruling would be construed by the members of a particular political party.

As you may recall, the League has supported bills to eliminate the contested election of Circuit Court Judges altogether. Removing judges from the partisan nomination process in the primary election as proposed by HB306 would be an improvement and more consistent with the nonpartisan nature of the office.

The LWVMD strongly urges a favorable report on HB 306.

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