



TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE

HB 257 Ballot Access – Voter Registration – Affiliating With a Party

POSITION – Support

BY: Linda T. Kohn, President

Date: February 6, 2024

The League of Women Voters of the United States believes that democratic government depends upon informed and active citizen participation, and that voting is a fundamental citizen right that must be guaranteed by law. **HB 257** would allow unaffiliated voters (a voter who has registered to vote but declined to affiliate with a political party) to affiliate with a political party at an early voting center during a primary election and vote a provisional ballot for the voter's preferred political party.

As of December 2023, there were 887,739 unaffiliated voters in the state of Maryland. The majority of unaffiliated voters are new citizens, young voters, or first-time voters.

There are many reasons why people don't register with a party. They may not be aware that Maryland is a closed primary state dramatically limiting the choices on their ballot. They may not be prepared to select a party when they show up to get a driver's license and find out they have been registered to vote. They may be excited about becoming a citizen and register at a naturalization ceremony but feel they don't know enough about the political parties to make a choice that day.

During every primary election thousands of voters vote provisionally because they had no idea, when showing up at the polling place, that they could only vote in non-partisan elections.

During the primary election early voting period these non-affiliated voters may have received information from party volunteers at the early voting site, and are now confident to make an informed decision to affiliate.

Since 2017, the League has been supporting legislation allowing unaffiliated voters the opportunity to choose a party at early voting or on election day because we already have mechanisms in place to register voters on those occasions. We appreciate that passage of HB 257 is progress towards our goal as it expands the window of opportunity for more Marylanders to exercise their right to vote in primary elections.

LWVMD strongly urges a favorable report on **HB 257**