



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS® OF MARYLAND, INC.

TESTIMONY TO THE SENATE EDUCATION, HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

SB 58 – Election Law – Election Observers

POSITION: Support, with amendments

BY: Barbara Schnackenberg and Nancy Soreng Co-Presidents

DATE: January 19, 2017

The League of Women Voters of the United States believes that in order to ensure integrity and voter confidence in elections, voting systems and procedures should be secure, accurate, recountable, accessible and transparent. It is pursuant to this position, the Maryland League of Women Voters supports the addition of provisions to Maryland Election Law that allow for Election Observers to be added to the statutory list of persons to be designated to be present in polling places, and other places where the election process is carried out. We do, however, offer two clarifying amendments to offer:

SB 58 authorizes “an academic institution engaged in research on elections and the election process: to designate a registered voter at each place of registration and election.” The League suggests that the term “academic institution” may be overbroad, and should be limited to having either the academic institution, or the designated Election Observer approved by the State Board of Elections.

Additionally, SB 58 specifies the entities that have the right to designate “a registered voter” as an Election Observer, then specifies that to be designated as an Election Observer, an individual must be engaged in research on elections and the election process or an international election observer. The League feels that it is possible that both international election observers, and individuals engaged in research on elections and the election process who are interested in observing Maryland elections might not be “registered voters” in Maryland. While it is acceptable and desirable to require that designated Challengers and Watchers be registered voters, it seems that requirement may be onerous on academic researchers and international election observers.

The League of Women Voters is certainly supportive of the intent of this legislation – allowing international election observers and academic researchers observation access to our election process.

We urge a favorable report on SB 58.