

# HOUSE BILL 140

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CF SB 56

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By: **Delegates Guyton, Bagnall, Boyce, Forbes, Hettleman, Hornberger,  
C. Jackson, Lehman, R. Lewis, Lierman, McIntosh, Metzgar,  
Palakovich Carr, Stewart, and K. Young**

Introduced and read first time: January 15, 2020

Assigned to: Ways and Means

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## A BILL ENTITLED

1 AN ACT concerning

2 **Election Law – Petitions and Ballot Questions – Plain Language Requirement**

3 FOR the purpose of requiring that a certain statement included on the signature page of a  
4 petition seeking to place a question on the ballot be written in plain language  
5 reasonably calculated to be understood by an individual who has attained no higher  
6 than a certain level of reading comprehension; requiring that a certain statement  
7 about the purpose of a question on the ballot be written in plain language reasonably  
8 calculated to be understood by an individual who has attained no higher than a  
9 certain level of reading comprehension; providing for a delayed effective date; and  
10 generally relating to petitions and ballot questions.

11 BY repealing and reenacting, without amendments,  
12 Article – Election Law  
13 Section 6–201(a) and (d)  
14 Annotated Code of Maryland  
15 (2017 Replacement Volume and 2019 Supplement)

16 BY repealing and reenacting, with amendments,  
17 Article – Election Law  
18 Section 6–201(c) and 7–103(b)  
19 Annotated Code of Maryland  
20 (2017 Replacement Volume and 2019 Supplement)

21 SECTION 1. BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF MARYLAND,  
22 That the Laws of Maryland read as follows:

23 **Article – Election Law**

24 6–201.

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EXPLANATION: CAPITALS INDICATE MATTER ADDED TO EXISTING LAW.

[Brackets] indicate matter deleted from existing law.



1 (a) A petition shall contain:

2 (1) an information page; and

3 (2) signature pages containing not less than the total number of signatures  
4 required by law to be filed.

5 (c) Each signature page shall contain:

6 (1) a description of the subject and purpose of the petition, conforming to  
7 the requirements of regulations;

8 (2) if the petition seeks to place a question on the ballot, either:

9 (i) a fair and accurate summary of the substantive provisions of the  
10 proposal **WRITTEN IN PLAIN LANGUAGE REASONABLY CALCULATED TO BE**  
11 **UNDERSTOOD BY AN INDIVIDUAL WHO HAS ATTAINED NO HIGHER THAN A GRADE 6**  
12 **LEVEL OF READING COMPREHENSION;** or

13 (ii) the full text of the proposal;

14 (3) a statement, to which each signer subscribes, that:

15 (i) the signer supports the purpose of that petition process; and

16 (ii) based on the signer's information and belief, the signer is a  
17 registered voter in the county specified on the page and is eligible to have his or her  
18 signature counted;

19 (4) spaces for signatures and the required information relating to the  
20 signers;

21 (5) a space for the name of the county in which each of the signers of that  
22 page is a registered voter;

23 (6) a space for the required affidavit made and executed by the circulator;  
24 and

25 (7) any other information required by regulation.

26 (d) If the petition seeks to place a question on the ballot and the sponsor elects to  
27 print a summary of the proposal on each signature page as provided in subsection (c)(2)(i)  
28 of this section:

29 (1) the circulator shall have the full text of the proposal present at the time  
30 and place that each signature is affixed to the page; and

1 (2) the signature page shall state that the full text is available from the  
2 circulator.

3 7–103.

4 (b) Each question shall appear on the ballot containing the following information:

5 (1) a question number or letter as determined under subsection (d) of this  
6 section;

7 (2) a brief designation of the type or source of the question;

8 (3) a brief descriptive title in boldface type;

9 (4) a condensed statement of the purpose of the question **WRITTEN IN**  
10 **PLAIN LANGUAGE REASONABLY CALCULATED TO BE UNDERSTOOD BY AN**  
11 **INDIVIDUAL WHO HAS ATTAINED NO HIGHER THAN A GRADE 6 LEVEL OF READING**  
12 **COMPREHENSION**; and

13 (5) the voting choices that the voter has.

14 SECTION 2. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, That this Act shall take effect  
15 January 1, 2021.