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HB140: Election Law- Petitions and Ballot Questions- Plain Language Requirement
Ways and Means Committee
Position: Support
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The Arc Maryland is the largest statewide advocacy organization dedicated to the rights and quality of life of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. We stand in support of HB140 which would require that ballots and petitions to be written in plain language at a maximum of a 6th grade reading level.

A generally accepted way that readability (a measure of reading ease) is measured is the **Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level Assessment**, which, in simplified language, applies a calculation to sentence's length and number of three-syllable words to come up with a "grade level." It is widely used throughout the world and simple to apply.

When we think about reading grade levels of written material, we are not necessarily focusing on education but rather on "ease of comprehension". A 4th to 6th grade level is considered by many scholarly articles to be **barrier-free**; information that can be read quickly and comprehended well by all adult readers. When writing is much above this reading level it takes enhanced concentration and people experience more difficulty with comprehension. These people are more likely to skim the question on a ballot or skip the question altogether for fear of misunderstanding and answering the question wrong.

According to a 2012 study, *Readability of Patient Education Materials Available at the Point of Care* conducted by Lauren M. Stossel, BA, Nora Segar, MD, MPH, et al. referencing health material literacy:

"The average US resident reads at an 8th grade level, and the average Medicare beneficiary reads at a 5th grade level. These statistics have implications for patients, including their ability to understand common medical terms. In a study of 249 adults at a metropolitan Emergency Department, investigators found that nearly 80% could not correctly state that "hemorrhage" meant "bleeding", "myocardial infarction" meant "heart attack", or that "fractured" meant "broken". This is despite the fact that greater than 50% of surveyed patients had a college education."

The ability to participate in the democratic process is a fundamental right for all citizens of Maryland, including people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD). A mandate to ensure this reading level does not exceed the 6th grade level of readability helps to insure the inclusivity of the democratic process, not only for people with I/DD but for all Marylanders. For these reasons, we urge a favorable report on HB 140.

Respectfully submitted,
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