



TESTIMONY FOR SB0039
Ballot Access - Affiliating With a Party - Unaffiliated Voters

Bill Sponsor: Senator Kagan

Committee: Education, Energy, and the Environment

Organization Submitting: Maryland Legislative Coalition

Person Submitting: Cecilia Plante, co-chair

Position: FAVORABLE

I am submitting this testimony in favor of SB0039 on behalf of the Maryland Legislative Coalition. The Maryland Legislative Coalition is an association of activists - individuals and grassroots groups in every district in the state. We are unpaid citizen lobbyists, and our Coalition supports well over 30,000 members.

Our members believe that voting is the soul of our democracy, and that the State's laws should provide for the easiest possible access to voting for everyone. One frustration for many new, young voters is the deadlines for affiliating with a party in relation to being eligible to vote in a primary. Most young voters are undecided about their affiliation, and only decide to vote in a primary based on who is running, or based on a perceived need to have their vote counted in the primary. These are not decisions that are made well in advance of the primary, and those voters who are not prepared to make an affiliation early are disenfranchised.

Since the primaries in Maryland often decide the entire election, being able to vote in a primary is pretty important. This bill requires a local Board of Elections that receives a request to affiliate with a political party from a voter who has declined to affiliate with a party after the close of registration but by 5 p.m. on the day before early voting begins, to make the change.

Extending the deadline to affiliate to close-of-business the day before a primary is a common-sense policy that will ensure that participation in primaries has fewer barriers. We support this bill and recommend a **FAVORABLE** report in committee.