

February 16, 2023

Testimony on SB 39
Ballot Access - Affiliating with a Party - Unaffiliated Voters
Energy, Education, and the Environment

Position: Favorable

Common Cause Maryland supports SB 39, which would allow unaffiliated, registered voters to change their registration to a party during early voting period.

Currently, registered unaffiliated voters who would like to register under a recognized political party to participate in Maryland's closed primary process must do so 21 days before the election. However, unregistered voters may show up in the week before the election, register, and choose a party affiliation. The disparity created by the deadline for unaffiliated voters is arbitrary, confusing, and an unnecessary burden.

This is no small issue in the Old Line State. Maryland's number of unaffiliated voters has grown at a rapid pace, doubling over the last decade and a half. Over 750,000 voters in Maryland are currently registered as unaffiliated. Most of those voters register as unaffiliated to express their disapproval of the party that they feel should represent them, but few are aware that such a registration could affect their ability to participate in Maryland's primaries.

While those hundreds of thousands of Marylanders can freely participate in the general election, they are unable to meaningfully participate in Maryland's closed-primary system. And in a state where demographic realities and partisan gerrymandering basically guarantee many races to certain political parties, that means that unaffiliated voters are shut out from the most important election of the cycle.

SB 39 would allow for more voters to have a more meaningful impact on the democratic process in a way that would not materially impact the state's current preference for closed primaries.

For the reasons above we support SB 39 and urge the committee to report favorably.