



**LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS®
OF MARYLAND, INC.**

**TESTIMONY TO THE EDUCATION, HEALTH, AND ENVIRONMENTAL
AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

**SB 170 – VOTER REGISTRATION – AFFILIATION WITH POLITICAL
PARTY AND PARTICIPATION IN PRIMARY ELECTION, CAUCUS OR
CONVENTION**

POSITION: SUPPORT, WITH AMENDMENT

**BY: BARBARA SCHNACKENBERG & NANCY SORENG
CO-PRESIDENTS**

DATE: FEBRUARY 4, 2016

The League of Women Voters supports all efforts to provide voters and voter registrants with information that is helpful to them in their participation in the election process.

This legislation would require the statewide voter registration form to include the statement “You must register with a political party if you want to take part in that political party’s primary election, caucus or convention.” Presumably, this statement is to educate registrants that their failure to affiliate with a political party will prevent them from voting in party primary elections. This is valuable information to new voters who may consider registering as unaffiliated.

However, this statement may be misleading. Section 8-202 of Maryland Election Law contains a provision for allowing political parties to open their primary. Article 33, Section 8, Subtitle 2 provides, in part: “(c) Process to allow voting by persons unaffiliated with party. – If a political party chooses to permit voters not affiliated with the party to vote in the party’s primary election, the chairman of the party’s State central committee shall so notify the State Board at least 6 months before the date of the primary election.”

The League suggests that the statement this legislation requires be added to the voter registration application be amended to say “You must register with a political party if you want to take part in that political party’s primary election, caucus or convention, unless the political party has notified the State Boards of Elections that it intends to allow unaffiliated voters to participate in that political party’s primary election.”

The League supports the effort to educate potential voter registrants of the ramifications of not electing to affiliate with a political party, but strongly urge the above proposed amendment to SB 170 to prevent any confusion.