



# THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF MARYLAND, INC.

## **HB 344 – VOTER REGISTRATION – AFFILIATION WITH POLITICAL PARTY AND PARTICIPATION IN PRIMARY ELECTION, CAUSUS OR CONVENTION**

**POSITION: SUPPORT, WITH AMENDMENT**

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

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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 or voters new to Maryland who may consider registering as unaffiliated.

However, this statement, while currently in use on the voter registration application instructions, 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.”

While there is not sufficient room to add any language to the application itself beyond what is being proposed by this legislation, the League suggests this statement, “You must register with a political party if you want to take part in that party’s primary election, caucus or convention, except in the rare event when the political party has notified the State Board of Elections that it intends to allow unaffiliated voters to participate in their party’s primary election” be added to the instructions portion of the Voter Registration Application.

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 HB 344 to prevent any confusion.