



THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF MARYLAND, INC.

TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE WAYS & MEANS COMMITTEE

HB 1007 – FREEDOM TO VOTE ACT

POSITION: FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS

BY: BARBARA SCHNACKENBERG AND NANCY SORENG CO-PRESIDENTS

DATE: MARCH 3, 2016

The League of Women Voters was founded on the concept that voter participation is an essential element of a successful democracy. Our organization has worked for over 96 years to assure the right to vote of every citizen. This legislation would provide an opportunity for hundreds of thousands of Maryland citizens to exercise this right. This is why we support modernizing our voter registration system.

This legislation would make voter registration more accurate, more secure and more accessible to eligible Maryland voters and eliminate barriers to registration and participation. It would update Maryland's current paper-based system with a secure electronic system that would provide the opportunity for more eligible Marylanders to be registered to vote.

In a comprehensive Automatic Voter Registration system, eligible persons would be informed of the (new) automatic registration system at the point of service at the MVA, the Health Care Exchange and any other social service agency that currently collects residency, age, and citizenship information and has the capacity to seamlessly share this data with the Board of Elections. If the person does not opt out of voter registration at that point, they will be given the opportunity to select a party and their registration will be complete. In addition, periodically, the MVA, the Health Care Exchange and other qualified agencies would send to the State Board of Elections, the citizenship, name, address and birth date of individuals they believe could qualify to register to vote. The Board of Elections would review this data and if they determine that these citizens are not yet registered to vote, but are qualified to be registered, they will send those names on the local Board of Elections in the jurisdiction where the citizen lives. The local Board would then inform the person through a mailing that unless they respond within a specified time frame that they do not wish to be registered to vote, they will be added to the voter rolls. This mailing will include a method for the newly registered voter to indicate which, if any party they wish to identify as their affiliation.

Other features of this legislation include strengthening the practices of institutions of higher education and social service agencies that are not able at this time to participate in Automatic Voter Registration in regard to offering students and clients the opportunity to "opt in" to registration.

We are working with the sponsors of both the Senate Bill SB350 and the House Bill HB1007 to incorporate amendments that will result in a workable, safe, secure, efficient way to register people to vote so they participate in the democratic process. We urge a favorable report on HB1007.