



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

**TESTIMONY TO THE SENATE EDUCATION HEALTH & ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS
COMMITTEE**

HB 1009 – TASK FORCE TO STUDY INCREASED VOTER PARTICIPATION

POSITION: FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENT

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The mission of the League of Women Voters is to encourage informed and active participation of citizens in government. One of our core values is that the responsibility of good government rests on the shoulders of its citizens, and voting is the ultimate expression of that responsibility. We are very supportive of the creation of a Task Force to Study Increased Voter Participation.

The Task Force proposed in HB 1009 will look at vote-by-mail options, expansion of Election Day registration and the expansion of early voting locations, days and hours. Each of these issues are worthy of a close look by legislators and Maryland citizens as potential efforts to increase voter participation, and these particular issues can easily be addressed in a non-partisan manner by the Task Force members.

We are not naïve and we comprehend that there are many reasons why voters do or do not engage in a particular election. However, a Maryland voter participation rate of a little over 44% in the 2014 general election is a sign of problems that may be fixed by making voting more accessible through Election Day Registration or a robust vote-by mail opportunities. While more than 50% of registered voters participated in that election in ten counties, the participation rate in three of the largest jurisdictions was in the 30-40% range, a rate that cannot be sustained in a healthy democracy.

States with vote-by-mail have reported increased voter participation rates, but this solution is one which needs to be studied and assessed for security and cost efficiency. The same is true for expanded early voting, which has shown increased popularity in Maryland.

Our suggested amendment is to add to the study an exploration of a more robust Automatic Voter Registration system than HB 1007, as currently amended, provides.

We recommend a favorable report on HB1009.