

DEBATES

NOTE: The League organizes candidate forums in which candidates address a range of issues. These are commonly called “debates” although a debate technically involves two persons or teams arguing the pros and cons of a proposition. Because “debate” is more commonly understood, we use that term in referring to our forums.

I. The LWVMDEF is responsible for organizing debates for any of the statewide offices; namely, Governor, Lt. Governor, Comptroller, Attorney General and U.S. Senators.

II. Prior to the primary and/or general elections, it is the role of the LWVMD/LWVMDEF to initiate and manage League-sponsored debates for any of the statewide races. Debates affecting those offices should not be sponsored by LLs without LWVMD Board approval. LLs may hold forums for the U.S. House of Representatives, the State Senate, the House of Delegates and local county, city or municipal offices. (Please see Nonpartisanship section.)

III. LWVMDEF may respond favorably to requests from other organizations to cosponsor additional gubernatorial and senatorial debates if they are nonpartisan and if candidates meet League standards for participation. Caution should be exercised when co-sponsoring with other organizations, especially single-issue organizations. LWVMDEF will not cosponsor a debate with an organization that endorses candidates, whether those endorsements are made before or after the debate. Co-sponsored events should not conflict with any State League-managed debates called for in the previous paragraph, in timing or personnel or financial resource requirements. In order to ensure the largest audience without straining League resources, LWVMDEF will cosponsor a debate only if it will be video recorded and the recording made available on a sponsoring organization’s website. This same policy applies to requests for assistance, e.g., timekeeping, moderating or furnishing questions.

IV. Debates aim to serve the following purposes:

- A. Educate the public about issues.
- B. Allow face-to-face comparisons of the candidates and their positions.

V. When the League is the sole or lead cosponsor:

- A. A decision on criteria for candidate participation will be made not later than the filing deadline for the statewide primary election. If LWVMDEF decides to sponsor debate(s) for specific statewide office(s), the President will appoint a debate management committee.
- B. The committee should estimate how much the debate(s) will cost so that money can be budgeted and donations can be solicited to cover costs beyond those already in the prepared budget.
- C. The media should be informed shortly after the decision that the LWVMDEF plans to sponsor and manage one or more debate(s). Efforts should be made to obtain broadcasting coverage throughout the state.

D. The debate(s) should occur prior to the beginning of early voting, if at all possible.

VI. To be invited to participate in a LWVMDEF debate for the Primary Election a candidate must:

- A. Be legally qualified, if elected, to hold the office under federal and state law; AND
- B. Have filed and met all requirements to be on the ballot according to Maryland's election laws and complied with applicable state and federal laws regarding disclosure of campaign finances; AND
- C. Have demonstrated significant voter interest and support by:
 - 1. Being one of the top 4 candidates receiving at least 2% public support in a recognized, nonpartisan statewide public opinion poll; OR
 - 3. If no such poll exists, the candidate must:
 - Provide examples of campaign coverage (discussing candidate's views on the issues) by at least two major media sources in different geographical areas of the state AND
 - Demonstrate that a formal campaign is being conducted by the existence of campaign headquarters and staff or an active (updated at least weekly) social media presence (i.e. website, Facebook, Twitter) and reporting campaign contributions from at least 100 donors.

VII. To be invited to participate in a LWVMDEF debate for the General Election a candidate must:

- A. Be legally qualified, if elected, to hold the office under federal and state law and complied with applicable state and federal laws regarding disclosure of campaign finances; AND
- B. Have filed and met all requirements to be on the ballot according to Maryland's election laws; AND
- C. Have demonstrated significant voter interest and support by:
 - 1. Being nominated by a recognized political party in Maryland OR
 - 2. Being one of the top 3 candidates with at least 5% of public support in a recognized, nonpartisan statewide public opinion poll (or, if the difference between the 3rd and 4th place candidates is less than the margin of error, all 4 candidates) OR
 - 3. If no such poll exists, the candidate must
 - Provide examples of campaign coverage by at least two major media sources in different geographical areas of the state AND
 - Demonstrate that a formal campaign is being conducted by the existence of campaign headquarters and staff or an active (updated at least weekly) social media presence (i.e., website, Facebook, Twitter) and reporting to the State Board of Elections or Federal Election Commission campaign contributions from at least 100 donors.

VIII. Broadcasters Exception:

It is the policy of the League of Women Voters of Maryland that candidate debates and forums should be inclusive of all candidates who have met the criteria outlined in VI and VII above. However, if the debate or candidates' forum is co-sponsored by a

broadcasting station and the station is not able to provide coverage if all candidates are included, the forum must include at least those candidates who meet the following criteria:

- A. Be legally qualified, if elected, to hold the office under federal and state law; AND
- B. Have filed and met all requirements to be on the ballot according to Maryland's election laws and complied with applicable state and federal laws regarding disclosure of campaign finances; AND
- C. For a primary election contest, demonstrate significant voter interest and support by:
 - 1. Being one of the top 3 candidates with 5% of public support in a recognized, nonpartisan statewide public opinion poll (or, if the difference between the 3rd and 4th place candidates is less than the margin of error, all 4 candidates); OR
 - 2. If no such poll exists,
 - a. Provide multiple examples of campaign coverage by at least two major media sources in different geographical areas of the state AND
 - b. Demonstrate that a formal campaign is being conducted by the existence of campaign headquarters and staff or an active (updated at least weekly) social media presence (i.e., website, Facebook, Twitter) and reporting to the State Board of Elections and/or the Federal Election Commission campaign contributions from at least 100 donors.
- D. For a general election contest, demonstrate significant voter interest and support by:
 - 1. Being one of the top 3 candidates receiving at least 5% of public support in a recognized, nonpartisan statewide public opinion poll (or, if the difference between the 3rd and 4th place candidates is less than the margin of error, all 4 candidates) OR
 - 2. If no such poll exists,
 - a. Provide multiple examples of campaign coverage by at least two major media sources in different geographical areas of the state AND
 - b. Demonstrate that a formal campaign is being conducted by the existence of campaign headquarters and staff or an active (updated at least weekly) social media presence (i.e., website, Facebook, Twitter) and reporting to the State Board of Elections and/or the Federal Election Commission campaign contributions from at least 100 donors.

The broadcaster exception applies does not apply to webcasting of a debate by a college or other nonprofit entity.