



THE GREATER BETHESDA
CHAMBER of COMMERCE

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Testimony on behalf of the Greater Bethesda Chamber of Commerce

*In Support of
House Bill 496—Election Law—Unaffiliated Voters—Open Primary Elections*

*February 11, 2026
House Government, Labor and Elections Committee*

The Greater Bethesda Chamber of Commerce (GBCC) was founded in 1926. Since then, the organization has grown to more than 600 businesses located throughout the Greater Bethesda area and beyond. On behalf of these members, we appreciate the opportunity to provide written comments on House Bill 496—Election Law—Unaffiliated Voters—Open Primary Elections.

House Bill 496 allows unaffiliated voters the ability to either vote the ballot for unaffiliated voters or the ballot of the political party of the voter's choice in a primary election. In addition, this bill prohibits a voter unaffiliated with a political party who votes the ballot of a political party in a primary election from automatically becoming affiliated with the political party whose ballot the voter voted. According to the Montgomery County Board of Elections, one quarter of Montgomery County residents are unaffiliated, all of whom choose not to affiliate for different reasons. This is common among some immigrant communities, where some reports suggest that as much as fifty percent of foreign-born voters do not identify with either political party. Others may simply choose to be unaffiliated to avoid the constraints of a political party. This bill would allow those unaffiliated Marylanders the ability to vote and have their voice heard in the primary election, thereby increasing overall voter turnout and encouraging broader civic engagement.

For these reasons, we would respectfully request a favorable vote on House Bill 496. Thank you for the opportunity to provide written comments.