

# FairVote ACTION

Maryland General Assembly  
State House  
100 State Circle  
Annapolis, MD 21401-1925

Monday, January 9, 2016

I am writing to express FairVote Action's support for the 2017 version of 2016's HB 1301, to amend the law relating to retention of status for political parties. FairVote Action is a non-partisan organization dedicated to fair elections. We are a national group, but have been based in Maryland for nearly two decades. I am also executive director of FairVote, which researches and proposes reforms to our electoral systems to strengthen the voices of voters by giving them greater choice in elections.

One way to ensure a variety of choices for voters is by enacting reasonable ballot access requirements for political parties and independent candidates. Under current law, parties can gain recognition from the state with a petition signed by 10,000 registered voters or by having 1% of voters registered as members with the party itself. This second threshold is unreasonable. Although actual membership in a party is a much stronger endorsement of its status than simply signing a petition, 1% of all registered voters is nearly four times higher than the signature threshold of 10,000.

The proposed legislation would allow parties to retain their status with 10,000 enrolled members – equal to the number of signatures they would need from voters at large. This saves parties the time and resources needed to gather the signatures. It is in line with FairVote's model legislation on ballot access. This common sense change would protect the ability of small parties to appear on the ballot in every election, representing more political views and giving voters more choices.

Voters having real choices on election day is crucial to a healthy democracy. That is why FairVote supports reforms such as ranked choice voting and why we strongly encourage the passage of this bill.

Sincerely,



Rob Richie  
President