

# *Common Sense and Voter Equality in Ballot Access*

By: Coalition for Common Sense Ballot Access

*Bill Number Pending*

## **Our Goal: Allow 10,000 Party-Affiliated Voters to Maintain a Party's Qualification**

**The number of affiliated voters required to continue a party's qualification (existence) should equal the same number of registered voters required to form a new party. This qualification allows a party to nominate and place candidates on the ballot.**

The bill provides that the same number of voters currently required to form a new party by petition (10,000) is also adequate to keep that party legally qualified, when that number of voters has registered as members of that particular party.

The bill gives equal weight to every voter's expression of support for a party being qualified. Party affiliation is an equal—if not stronger—indication of a party's support than a petition signature.

**This reform was unanimously recommended by the Montgomery County Council's Right to Vote Task Force in June 2014.**

The petition test places a huge repetitive burden on smaller parties and our Boards of Elections. A petition drive sounds easy, but it entails the following:

- 15-17,000 petitions collected to ensure passing the 10,000 threshold—because voters often don't know their registered address, don't know their formal registered voter name, or their signature is illegible
- Many weeks of county Board of Elections staff time verifying each individual signature every four years, costing hundreds of thousands of dollars
- 30% of these parties' time, every election cycle, spent on the petition drive instead of developing policies and having discussions with voters (which is the point of having a party)

\$30,000 was spent by the Maryland Libertarian Party on their last petition drive. Six thousand dollars of the Maryland Green Party's campaign funds were spent on its last petition drive, along with thousands of hours of volunteer time. Thousands more hours of volunteer time were spent by the Green Party on individual verification of information in the state voter database before submission—because missing the 10,000 mark by even a single signature wipes all party candidates off the ballot.

This bill:

- replaces "1%" with "10,000" affiliated voters. It is a one-word change.
- does not affect new parties' ability to use the petition method for first qualification
- does not affect parties gaining more than 1% of the vote in a state-wide election to qualify
- counts party-affiliated voters on Dec. 31<sup>st</sup> of each year, covering the next year

More information at: [www.montgomerycountygreenparty.org/ballot-access-bill/](http://www.montgomerycountygreenparty.org/ballot-access-bill/)

The Coalition for Common Sense Ballot Access consists of organizations and individuals supporting free and fair elections, including fair access to the ballot. The coalition includes: Green Party of Maryland, Libertarian Party of Maryland, Constitution Party of Maryland, and the Ujima Party.