

**CITY OF BALTIMORE
COUNCIL BILL 15-0276R
(Resolution)**

Introduced by: Councilmembers Henry, Scott
Introduced and read first time: November 9, 2015
Assigned to: Judiciary and Legislative Investigations Committee

A RESOLUTION ENTITLED

1 A COUNCIL RESOLUTION concerning

2 **Request for State Action – Nonpartisan Municipal Primary Elections**

3 FOR the purpose of calling on the General Assembly to enact, and the Governor to sign,
4 legislation authorizing the voters of Baltimore City to adopt a nonpartisan primary election
5 system to ensure inclusive and democratic elections for City officials.

6 **Recitals**

7 Baltimore is about to enter its first municipal election year under its newly aligned election
8 cycle. The change from off-year elections to elections in Presidential election years was intended
9 to halt and reverse a longstanding decline in voter participation rates and encourage more
10 Baltimoreans to be involved in selecting their leaders.

11 Although it is hoped that this change will bring more voters to the polls, another oddity of
12 Baltimore elections, the partisan primary system, will prevent many of them from having a
13 meaningful say in who will represent them in City Hall.

14 Baltimore, unlike most major cities, selects party candidates for the general election through
15 partisan primaries. Since Baltimore voters are overwhelmingly registered Democrats and no
16 non-Democrat has been elected to a major City office for decades, this effectively means that the
17 preferences of Baltimore’s thousands of non-Democratic voters have no impact on the selection
18 of our leaders.

19 Equally troubling, the fact that a primary candidate can secure the nomination and the party’s
20 sole spot on the general election ballot, with a plurality of votes rather than an outright majority,
21 means that in a crowded field of candidates the party nomination can easily go to someone whom
22 a majority of primary voters actually voted against. Under these circumstances, we could find
23 ourselves in a city of well over half a million being governed by people who were the first choice
24 of only a few thousand residents – a profoundly anti-democratic result.

25 Many other communities – including more than 80% of the U.S.’s 50 largest cities with
26 elected mayors – avoid this problem by having some form of nonpartisan primary election.
27 Under this system, all qualified candidates for an office – regardless of party affiliation – run in
28 one primary election open to all voters. A candidate must then secure a majority of votes in
29 either the primary or a subsequent general election between the top two vote getters to be elected.
30 Adopting this approach ensures that all voters have a say in who will govern them and prevents a
31 candidate from being elected without genuine support from a majority of voters.

EXPLANATION: Underlining indicates matter added by amendment.
~~Strike out~~ indicates matter deleted by amendment.

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1 Baltimore would be well served to adopt this more democratic and inclusive approach,
2 particularly at a time when so many Baltimoreans are questioning whether or not our government
3 truly represents them and can be responsive to their needs. However, much like the effort to
4 align our municipal and national election cycles, this is a change that would need alterations to
5 State law to enact.

6 Moving to a nonpartisan primary system is an option that Baltimoreans deserve a chance to
7 consider for themselves. Accordingly, State law should be adjusted to allow Baltimore to adopt
8 this more inclusive system through a voter approved Charter amendment.

9 **NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF BALTIMORE,** That the
10 Council calls on the General Assembly to enact, and the Governor to sign, legislation authorizing
11 the voters of Baltimore City to adopt a nonpartisan primary election system to ensure inclusive
12 and democratic elections for City officials.

13 **AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED,** That a copy of this Resolution be sent to the Governor, the
14 Honorable Chairs and Members of the Baltimore City House and Senate Delegations to the
15 Maryland General Assembly, the President of the Maryland Senate, the Maryland House
16 Speaker, the Mayor, and the Mayor's Legislative Liaison to the City Council.