



City of Baltimore

City Council
City Hall, Room 408
100 North Holliday Street
Baltimore, Maryland 21202

Legislation Text

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INTRODUCTORY*

CITY OF BALTIMORE
COUNCIL BILL R
(Resolution)

Introduced by: Councilmember Henry

A RESOLUTION ENTITLED

A COUNCIL RESOLUTION concerning
Request for State Action - Nonpartisan Municipal Primary Elections

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

Recitals

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

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

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

Equally troubling, the fact that a primary candidate can secure the nomination, and the party's sole spot on the general election ballot, with a plurality of votes rather than an outright majority means that in a crowded field of candidates the party nomination can easily go to someone who a majority of primary voters actually voted against. Under these circumstances, we could find ourselves in a city

of well over half a million being governed by people who were the first choice of only a few thousand residents ♦ a profoundly anti-democratic result.

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

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

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

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

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

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