

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2016 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
First Reader

House Bill 1301
Ways and Means

(Delegate Carter, *et al.*)

Election Law - Political Party - Retention of Status

This bill changes the minimum number of registered voters – from 1% of the State’s registered voters to 10,000 of the State’s registered voters – that must be affiliated with a political party as of December 31 in order for a political party to retain its status as a political party, based on voter registration, until the next following December 31.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: The bill does not directly affect State finances.

Local Effect: The bill does not directly affect local government finances.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Current Law: Any group of registered voters may form a new political party by submitting a petition containing the signatures of at least 10,000 registered voters and meeting other specified requirements. A new political party retains its status as a political party until December 31 of the year of the second statewide general election following the party’s qualification. A political party can retain its status beyond that initial period if:

- the political party nominates a candidate for the highest office on the ballot in a statewide general election and the candidate receives at least 1% of the total vote for the office (in which case the political party retains its status through December 31 of the year of the next general election); or

- State voter registration totals, as of December 31, show that at least 1% of the State’s registered voters are affiliated with the political party (in which case the political party retains its status until the next following December 31).

A group that loses its status as a political party can regain its status only by qualifying through the same process for a new political party.

Background: There are 3.8 million registered voters in the State, making the minimum required number of affiliated registered voters needed for a political party to retain its status based on voter registration approximately 38,000. Currently the political parties in the State other than the Democratic and Republican parties each have registered voter totals of under 20,000 as shown in **Exhibit 1**.

Exhibit 1
Voter Registration – Recognized Political Parties
(as of January 2016)

<u>Party Affiliation</u>	<u>Number of Active Registered Voters</u>
Democratic	2,042,296
Republican	974,602
Libertarian	16,866
Green	8,324

Source: State Board of Elections

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: HB 626 of 2015 received a hearing in the House Ways and Means Committee, but no further action was taken. SB 1032 of 2014 received a hearing in the Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee, but no further action was taken.

Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): State Board of Elections, Department of Legislative Services

Fiscal Note History: First Reader - March 10, 2016
min/hlb

Analysis by: Scott D. Kennedy

Direct Inquiries to:
(410) 946-5510
(301) 970-5510