



Tuesday, September 2, 2025 | [e-Edition How-To](#) [Mobile App](#)

Maryland needs open primaries now

On Aug. 23, an opinion piece and a letter in the Star Democrat addressed the question of open primaries in Maryland. They both missed the mark by a mile. David Reel declared the reform to be “an idea whose time may never come.” No chance, no hope was his message. He is right in one sense. As long as Maryland voters continue to bend under the yolk of the two-party duopoly, nothing of consequence will change.

Open primaries, however, are consequential.

Michael Pullen commented on the same subject as well, saying the “open primary issue is not a crisis.” He went on to whine about the myriad sins of current national leadership. If criticism of leadership was an effective tool in bringing about a change in that leadership, he might bring more than just another Democratic talking point.

In states with closed primaries, like Maryland, registered members of each party select candidates to run in the general election. This leaves party loyalists (usually from the extreme wings) to choose who everyone else gets to vote for. Two dire consequences result. Voters are repeatedly faced with “the lesser of two evils” choice. This hurts election participation and voter confidence in the system.

Second, and more importantly, a significant portion of registered voters (in Maryland 22%) are excluded from a choice in the primary. Young voters are increasingly registering independent. Over one million voters are affected in our state. This is not democracy. Maryland is one of only 17 states that still have completely closed primaries. A closed primary, paid for by the government, is a violation of the Maryland state constitution and is the basis of an ongoing lawsuit in Maryland. If we believe in democracy and better leadership in government, we need to support the movement for open primaries in Maryland. (To learn more about the lawsuit and how you can support the fight for open primaries in Maryland, check out maryland.letusvote.org/news).

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