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TESTIMONY OF JAMES F. SHALLECK IN OPPOSITION TO HB0137 (MC 19-20) REQUIRING A 12th EARLY VOTING SITE AT WHITE OAK FOR THE 2020 ELECTIONS. HEARING ON JANUARY 29, 2020.

Madame Chair and Members of the Committee:

I am Jim Shalleck, President of the Montgomery County Board of Elections. I appear before you today speaking for myself and the Majority Members of our Board. Legislation for the 2020 elections, which our Board followed, allowed our Board of Elections the option of having a 12th Early Voting Site. A 12th site was not mandated in your legislation. Further, there was no legislative mandate to have a 12th site at White Oak. A majority of our Board voted not to have a 12th site for the 2020 elections. We took the option given to us by this Legislature. The reasons for the majority vote included the cost of a 12th site, approximately \$234,000. Further, we had a mandated expenditure from the State Board of Elections for approximately \$350,000 to upgrade our network communications.

The Majority felt that the concerns of certain East County voters and the Board Minority who proposed White Oak as a 12th site to prevent in the General Election a recurrence of long lines in certain precincts in the East County were being addressed. With the help of Councilman Hucker, the Board received an additional \$125,000 from the County Council, and our Board redirected assets and personnel to those precincts that had long lines in 2018 to address this problem.

Further, proponents of White Oak as a 12th site (noting these proponents never proposed for 2020 White Oak as one of our 11 mandated Early Voting Sites) argued that bus service in the White Oak area was inadequate to transport voters to the other Early Voting Sites in the East County. That concern could have been easily addressed by the County Executive ordering bus schedule and route adjustments and frequencies for the 8 days of early voting.

The day our Board Majority voted not to have a 12th site, I received two letters which I

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presented at the Board meeting. The first from County Executive Elrich stated that " I support adding a 12th early voting site for the general election. " He added that " I have concerns about the cost and additional benefit of implementing another early voting site for the primary election in this fiscal year." The second letter came from 7 of 9 Council members. Two members who did not sign the letter do not represent the White Oak area. The letter stated "which is why we are writing to urge the County Board of Elections add a 12th early-voting site for the 2020 general election in White Oak." Neither letter proposed a 12th site for the 2020 Primary. Both letters are enclosed herein. So where is the emergency for this legislation? The Executive and Council did not see the need for a 12th site for the 2020 Primary.

Since this controversy has arisen, residents from other parts of the County have appeared before our Board and the County's State Delegation. They point out that 4 of the 11 existing early voting sites are in the East County area near White Oak. See map enclosed herein. If this Bill passes, 5 of 12 sites will be near White Oak as opposed to serving other areas of the County where voters feel they are under served by a lack of early voting sites. Those areas include Poolesville, Darnestown, Clarksburg, and the northwest part of the County. A number of voters have urged our Board to select the Nancy Dacek Center in North Potomac as a 12th site to service the Western part of the County.

We have close to 730,000 eligible voters who are Board must serve. The Majority of our Board voted not to have any 12th site for 2020. We considered cost, capabilities, allocation of staff and volunteers, and the assets and personnel that are being deployed to those precincts that had long lines in 2018. Our vote was not directed to any region of the County.

Lastly, our Board's decision not to have a 12th early voting site was supported and ratified by the State Board of Elections. We have the expertise to run the elections. It is a bad precedent for the Legislature to overrule County and State Boards because they don't like their decision. You gave us the option to not have a 12th site. We took that option. We followed the law. Where is the emergency to justify this legislation? Thank you.



OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE
ROCKVILLE, MARYLAND 20850

Marc Elrich
County Executive

September 16, 2019

Montgomery County Board of Elections
18753 N. Frederick Ave, Suite 210
Gaithersburg, MD 20879

Dear Chair Shalleck:

Turnout is expected to be high for the 2020 general election, therefore, I support adding a 12th early voting site for the general election. This additional convenient voting opportunity will hopefully increase turnout and help reduce lines on election day which was a problem in 2018.

I have concerns about the cost and additional benefit of implementing another early voting site for the primary election in this fiscal year. As you know, Maryland's primary is on the back end of the primary calendar. If the presidential nominations are already determined by the time of our primary, turnout might be very low for the whole primary as there are no other competitive races in our county.

Thank you for your role in making our democracy work.

Sincerely,



MONTGOMERY COUNTY COUNCIL
ROCKVILLE, MARYLAND

September 16, 2019

Montgomery County Board of Elections
18753 N. Frederick Ave. Suite 210
Gaithersburg, MD 20879

Dear Chair Shalleck:

Voting is the cornerstone of our democracy. Easy access to voting, including convenient locations and hours, is essential to ensuring the greatest participation and fairest elections possible. Many pundits are expecting record election turnout next year, which is why we are writing to urge the County Board of Elections add a 12th early-voting site for the 2020 general election in White Oak.

Many of the polling places with the longest wait times for voters last November were along the [U.S. 29 and New Hampshire Avenue corridors](#). *The Washington Post* reported that some voters waited well over an hour, some up to two hours, to vote at the Marilyn J. Praisner Community Recreation Center in Burtonsville. Some people left before voting, including seniors and disabled individuals who could not stand in line that long, as well as parents and caregivers who had to leave to pick up their kids or run errands.

Nationally, the average wait time to vote in 2016 was 8 minutes, according to an [MFI study](#). The Presidential Commission on Election Administration has committed to a national goal to limit the wait times for voting to no more than 30 minutes. Waiting an hour, or even more, to vote is simply unacceptable.

That's why we believe that the White Oak Recreation Center — which is more convenient to East County voters than the Burtonsville or Silver Spring early-voting sites — should be designated as the county's 12th early-voting site for the upcoming General election. Having early voting at White Oak will relieve pressure, and reduce the long lines, at nearby polling places on Election Day.

Having closer and more convenient early-voting centers — as well as early-voting centers that are sited on major transit corridors like U.S. 29 — is especially important in areas with low car ownership and high transit dependency like East County, where around 35 percent of adults do not own a car despite limited transit availability in that area.

Voting is our precious and hard-won right and responsibility as Americans. Let's make it as easy as possible.

Sincerely,

Nancy Navarro, Council President

Sidney Katz, Council Vice-President

Tom Hucker, Councilmember District 5

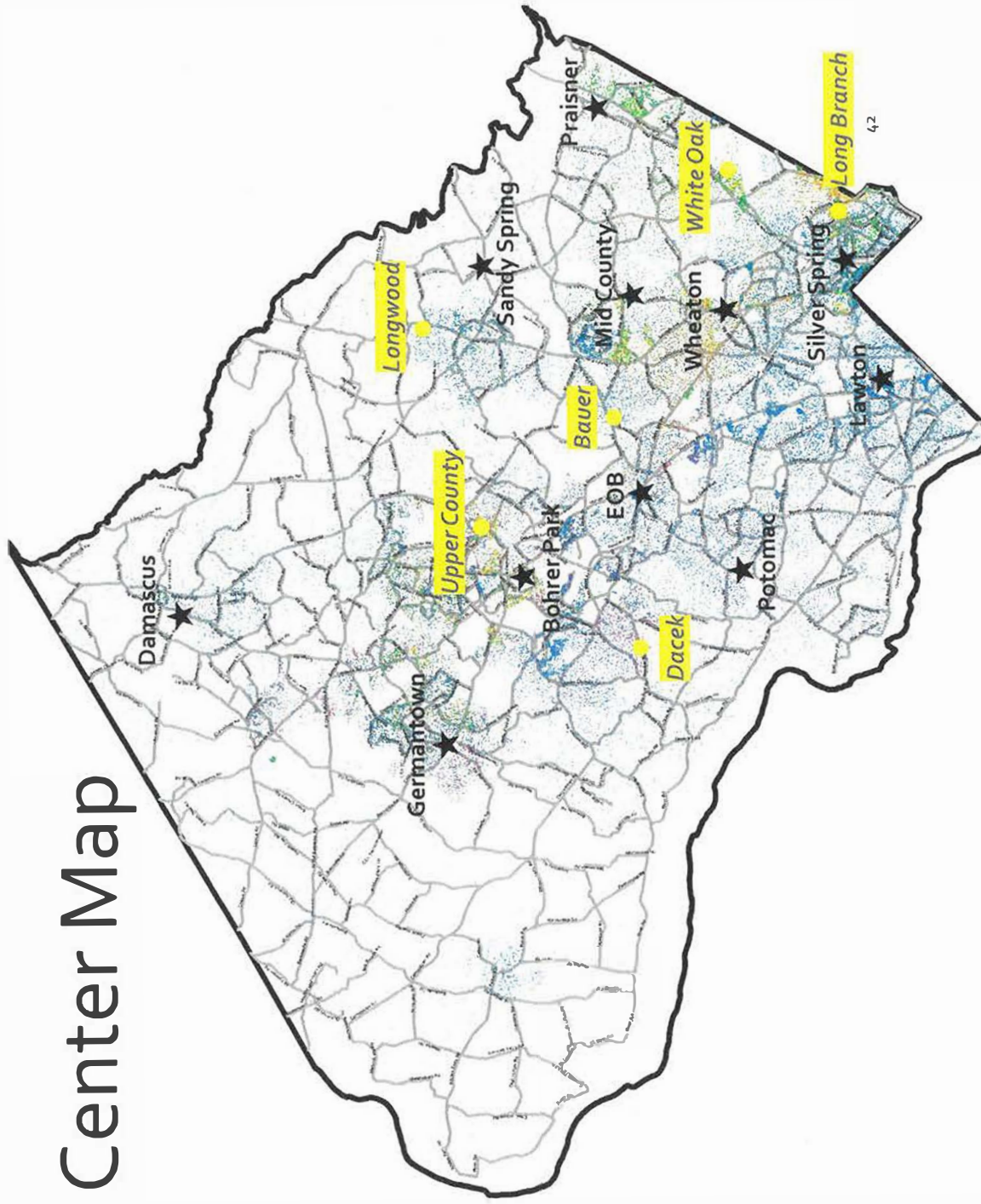
Gabe Albornoz, At-Large Councilmember

Evan Glass, At-Large Councilmember

Will Jawando, At-Large Councilmember

Hans Riemer, At-Large Councilmember

Early Voting Center Map



Yellow dots represent potential Early Voting Centers.