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Committee: Education, Energy, and the Environment
Testimony on: SB 5 General Assembly – Special Election to Fill a Vacancy in Office
Position: Favorable
Hearing Date: January 21, 2026

The Maryland Chapter of the Sierra Club urges a favorable report on SB 5. The bill is a proposed constitutional amendment that provides for election of a General Assembly member to fill a vacancy that occurs early in the legislator's 4-year term of office. We believe that consistently enabling voters to elect their General Assembly members is a valuable principle underlying Maryland's system of representative government.

SB 5 will require a special election to be held along with the Presidential election to fill a General Assembly vacancy that occurs at least 55 days before the candidate filing deadline for that election. Central committees would continue to appoint temporary legislators, who would serve until the special election. The bill would not affect the process for filling vacancies that occur after that date.

If this legislation had become law in 2014, 23 vacancies since then would have been affected. Most of those vacancies resulted from legislators being appointed to other offices in the first few months after an election. Voters in the affected districts did not have an opportunity to choose their legislator for over three years.

We recognize that some of Maryland's truly outstanding legislators first began their service after being appointed through the existing process, and the State in turn has benefited greatly. We support this reduction in the time appointed legislators serve before the next election, however, because we believe that, in general, elections result in closer connections between new legislators and their constituents.

The Sierra Club and its members advocate on behalf of both the natural and human environments, including promoting racial and social equity. As a grassroots organization, we seek to foster strong relationships between voters and their representatives in government.

We believe one of the principles of democratic systems is that people should have the opportunity to elect the leaders who enact laws and run their government. SB 5 will expand the opportunity for voters to elect their leaders in a fully transparent, public process and increase confidence in government. For these reasons, we urge a favorable report on SB 5.

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Founded in 1892, the Sierra Club is America's oldest and largest grassroots environmental organization. The Maryland Chapter has over 70,000 members and supporters, and the Sierra Club nationwide has over 800,000 members and nearly four million supporters.