

HOUSE BILL 997

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CF SB 680

By: **Delegates Hixson, Ebersole, Fennell, Long, Platt, and Turner**

Introduced and read first time: February 13, 2015

Assigned to: Ways and Means

A BILL ENTITLED

1 AN ACT concerning

2 **Blue Ribbon Commission on Voting, Openness, Transparency, and Equality**
3 **(VOTE) in Elections**

4 FOR the purpose of establishing the Blue Ribbon Commission on Voting, Openness,
5 Transparency, and Equality (VOTE) in Elections; providing for the composition,
6 chair, and staffing of the Commission; prohibiting a member of the Commission from
7 receiving certain compensation, but authorizing the reimbursement of certain
8 expenses; requiring the Commission to study and make recommendations regarding
9 certain matters; requiring the Commission to report its findings and
10 recommendations to the Governor and the General Assembly on or before a certain
11 date; providing for the termination of this Act; and generally relating to the Blue
12 Ribbon Commission on Voting, Openness, Transparency, and Equality (VOTE) in
13 Elections.

14 SECTION 1. BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF MARYLAND,
15 That:

16 (a) There is a Blue Ribbon Commission on Voting, Openness, Transparency, and
17 Equality (VOTE) in Elections.

18 (b) The Commission consists of the following members:

19 (1) two members of the Senate of Maryland, one representing each of the
20 principal political parties, appointed by the President of the Senate;

21 (2) two members of the House of Delegates, one representing each of the
22 principal political parties, appointed by the Speaker of the House;

23 (3) the following members appointed by the Governor:

EXPLANATION: CAPITALS INDICATE MATTER ADDED TO EXISTING LAW.

[Brackets] indicate matter deleted from existing law.



1 (i) five representatives of bipartisan civic organizations located in
2 each the following regions of the State:

- 3 1. Western;
- 4 2. National Capital;
- 5 3. Southern;
- 6 4. Central; and
- 7 5. the Eastern Shore;

8 (ii) one representative of the League of Women Voters;

9 (iii) one representative of the Democratic Party State Central
10 Committee;

11 (iv) one representative of the Republican Party State Central
12 Committee;

13 (v) one representative of the National Association for the
14 Advancement of Colored People;

15 (vi) one representative of the American Civil Liberties Union;

16 (vii) three representatives of nonprofit civil rights organizations that
17 advocate for each of the following groups:

- 18 1. Asian/Pacific Islanders;
- 19 2. Blacks/African Americans; and
- 20 3. Hispanics/Latinos;

21 (viii) one representative of the University System of Maryland;

22 (ix) one representative of the State Board of Elections; and

23 (x) two other individuals with a demonstrated record of strong civic
24 and community involvement and participation in the electoral process.

25 (c) To the extent practicable, the membership of the Commission shall reflect the
26 gender, racial, ethnic, and geographic diversity of the State.

27 (d) The chair of the Commission shall:

1 (1) be appointed by the Governor; and

2 (2) have academic or professional credentials as an expert on election
3 reform.

4 (e) The State Board of Elections and the Department of Legislative Services shall
5 provide staff for the Commission.

6 (f) A member of the Commission:

7 (1) may not receive compensation as a member of the Commission; but

8 (2) is entitled to reimbursement for expenses under the Standard State
9 Travel Regulations, as provided in the State budget.

10 (g) The Commission shall examine ways to encourage broader voter participation
11 and engage new voting populations through a study of the following issues:

12 (1) the advantages and disadvantages of:

13 1. open and closed primary elections; and

14 2. “top two” and “top four” primary elections in which the two
15 candidates or four candidates with the greatest number of votes advance to the general
16 election regardless of party affiliation;

17 (2) a system of public campaign financing for offices in the executive,
18 legislative, and judicial branches of State government;

19 (3) the use of proportional representation voting systems, such as
20 cumulative voting, preference voting, and instant runoff voting to increase electoral
21 competition and representativeness; and

22 (4) any other issue that the Commission determines is relevant to
23 increasing voter participation.

24 (h) On or before December 31, 2016, the Commission shall report its findings and
25 recommendations to the Governor and, in accordance with § 2–1246 of the State
26 Government Article, the General Assembly.

27 SECTION 2. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, That this Act shall take effect June
28 1, 2015. It shall remain effective for a period of 2 years and 1 month, and at the end of June
29 30, 2017, with no further action required by the General Assembly, this Act shall be
30 abrogated and of no further force and effect.