



BILL: HB0335

BILL TITLE: Election Law – Party and Elected Public Offices – Prohibitions

BILL SPONSOR: Delegate Boyce

POSITION: FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS

COMMITTEE: EHEA

HEARING DATE: March 25, 2021

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS OF HB0335

Cristi Demnowicz, Chair
Represent Maryland

A big problem in Maryland politics and governance is disproportionate influence and access insiders and monied interests have to elected and appointed positions relative to most others. One of the ways entrenched powers are able to maintain control is through the vast power given to major party central committees, including the power to appoint new members of the general assembly whenever a vacancy occurs. Represent Maryland, a pro-democracy grassroots group of Marylanders, strongly opposes this 21st century patronage system.

We feel that while there is much to be done to break this system down and deliver more power to regular Marylanders, HB0335 is a strong start. The intent of this legislation is to stop officials from 1) campaigning for both positions simultaneously, and 2) being elected to the state central committee while serving as a state or local elected official (or vice versa) which is currently a very common practice. This is problematic since it creates a concentration of power in a few officials, who then can appoint family, friends, and benefactors to key positions, which further concentrates their power. By prohibiting this, passage of HB0335 will assist in weakening this concentration of power.

In fact, we believe this bill should go further, and propose that the bill is amended to also apply to those who sit on a central committee and seek a central committee appointment to the general assembly when a vacancy occurs in their district. We have seen numerous cases where a central committee member puts their name forward for a vacancy and is then voted on by their colleagues. This scenario gives a significant advantage to that person over other qualified applicants, since they would be able to vote for themselves. We believe this is a conflict of interest and it is important to end this practice so a more equitable process is carried out to determine the best candidate for the vacancy.

Represent Maryland believes in abolishing central committee appointments entirely and filling vacancies democratically with special elections. This legislation, with the proposed amendment, is a strong step toward ending conflict of interests. We request that it is amended as mentioned then sent to the senate floor in order to pass this session.

Sincerely,
Cristi Demnowicz, Chair
Represent Maryland
Maryland Voter-LD7

Represent Maryland is a grassroots anti-corruption group of citizen advocates that #FightForDemocracy in Maryland. Our democracy solutions include: Public Election Funds, Independent Redistricting, Special Elections, Ranked Choice Voting, Increased Ethics and Transparency, and Increased Voter Participation. Learn more about our work at www.RepresentMaryland.org

Authorized by Represent Maryland PAC, T Miler, Treasurer