

January 19, 2021

**Testimony on HB 163
State Board of Elections – Membership – Appointments
Ways and Means**

Position: Information

Common Cause Maryland takes no position on HB 163 which would repeal the authority to appoint and remove the five members of the State Board of Elections from the Governor, giving the authority instead to the President of the Senate and Speaker of the House.

Currently, the five-member Board is appointed to fill a four-year term by the Governor, with Senate advice and consent. Each member belongs to a principal political party with neither party having more than three or less than two members. Each member appointed by the Governor has been named by the state central committee of the principal political party entitled to the appointment.

While we agree that we should be looking at ways to improve the process for appointing state and local board members and have no opposition to the Speaker of the House playing a role in the process, we don't believe the branch of Maryland Government appointing the members of the Board to be the issue. We instead should aim to improve the criteria outlined for those being considered for an appointment, which this bill does not address.

The existing criteria only looks at the amount of time those being considered have been registered to vote in the state and their party affiliation. It does not ensure the members of the Board reflect the demographics of the state - taking race, gender, location, or input from members of the community into consideration. It also does not take into consideration the level of knowledge those being considered for an appointment may have of the overall election process.

If we aim to ensure voting and the overall election process is free, fair, accessible, and equitable - we must first ensure those making decisions when appointed to these positions have an understanding of the election process and the different communities in our Maryland. We should also aim to provide appointed Board members with analysis, applying a race equity lens, that ensure they understand the impact their decisions will have on certain communities.

While we support the purpose behind HB 163, we are not sure it is the best route to achieve our goal. Thus, we take no position on this legislation.