

BRIAN GRIFFITHS

February 10, 2023

The Honorable Vanessa E. Atterbary
Chair, Ways and Means Committee
Room 131
House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Dear Madam Chair and members of the Committee,

I write to you today in **support** of **House Bill 417** General Assembly – Special Election to Fill a Vacancy in Office. The bill would allow for General Assembly vacancies to be filled by special election instead of appointment by the Governor if the vacancies occurred during the first year of a term.

The current process to fill General Assembly vacancies is a cumbersome and complicated process. Instead of providing voters an opportunity to meet their potential leaders and make their voices heard in the process, the selection process is often held by political party central committees in a manner that minimizes the impact voters can have on the process. Time and time again, these processes do not provide clear selections that represent the voters. Central Committees go out of their way to obfuscate the process, diminish voter participation, and provide predetermined outcomes beneficial to political insiders.

In both parties, from Carroll County to Frederick County, from Baltimore City to the Eastern Shore, General Assembly vacancies are filled by a process that often provides chaos over clarity. This chaos becomes problematic when you look at the number of legislators who have entered the General Assembly through the appointment process. In the previous session of the General Assembly, nearly ten percent of the General Assembly will be representing people who did not elect them.

As an example of the fundamental unfairness of the current process, in a 2021 vacancy in the House of Delegates in District 9A, a Delegate retired, anointed a preordained successor, and the successor was appointed to the House in a two-week span. At what point did anybody ask the voters who they wanted to represent them?

I do believe that this bill can be improved upon. I believe that special elections should be held if the vacancy occurs no later than one year prior to the next gubernatorial General Election. There is no reason that a small scale special election cannot be held at any point in the first three years of the term. While I note that there were issues with universal mail-in voting during the 2020 Elections, these issues are not nearly as important as ensuring that voters, not political committees, pick who represents them in Annapolis.

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This bill brings up fundamental issues of basic fairness in providing opportunities for voters to pick their elected officials. Even without my suggested improvements, this bill will make the Maryland General Assembly more representative of the people. As I have in past years, I urge you all to **vote yes** on **House Bill 417**.

A handwritten signature in brown ink, appearing to read "Brian Griffiths", with a long horizontal line extending to the right.