

Testimony in Favor of House Bill 871 (Constitutional Amendment)

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Dear Chair Pena-Melnyk, Vice-Chair Cullison, and Members of the Health and Government  
Operations Committee:

I am a first-generation immigrant from India. I have been living in Maryland for more than thirty years now. One of the features of the United States Constitution that the framers of the Indian constitution consciously adopted was religious liberty and not having a state religion. I was always proud of that connection that makes a pluralistic society viable.

I was surprised to find that even after the unanimous *Torcaso v. Watkins* Supreme Court decision, the state of Maryland never removed the sections of the state constitution that violated the US constitution's religious test clause. This portion of the constitution is not enforceable, and it shows poorly on our state around the country and the world.

Today, we are a much more religiously diverse society than we were when framing the state constitution. While Maryland was a haven for the Catholic community compared to the other colonies, the diversity was generally limited within the Christian faith that believed in a monotheist God as a common theme. Today, according to Pew Research, about 30% of the population is not Christian, 23% unaffiliated with any religion. The faith in one God is no longer a societal bonding mechanism, and people nurture their ethics and morals from many different sources.

People are drawn to public service based on their moral compass, which may not include belief in a god. We have a duty to make sure that they all feel welcome in the arena that we share. This amendment does just that.

We can update articles 36, 37 and 39 as proposed in the bill without hurting the feelings or faith of anybody. This amendment does not seek to exclude any person, group, or belief system. It expands the universe of inclusion as we want to as citizens of the state and the nation.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Diganta Das".

Diganta Das