



MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND
WOMEN'S DEMOCRATIC CLUB

P.O. Box 34047, Bethesda, MD 20827

www.womensdemocraticclub.org

**House Bill HB0643 – Insufficient Number of Candidates for a Primary Election
Ways and Means Committee – February 21, 2023
FAVORABLE**

Thank you for this opportunity to submit written testimony concerning an important priority of the Montgomery County Women's Democratic Club (WDC) for the 2023 legislative session. WDC is one of the largest and most active Democratic clubs in our state, with hundreds of politically active members, including many elected officials.

As the foundational principles of democratic government are under siege at the federal level and in many states, WDC has established a new *ad hoc* committee, Advancing Democracy in Maryland, to advocate for a menu of legislation that empowers voters, creates equality of voice and representation, and ensures the responsiveness of government institutions. We are proud that Maryland is generally in the forefront of pro-democracy reforms; yet we can always do better.

WDC's work to advance democracy in Maryland is guided by many of the recommendations of the 2020 report, [Our Common Purpose: Reinventing Democracy for the 21st Century](#), issued by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences' Commission on the Practice of Democratic Citizenship.

WDC supports the passage of HB643. HB643 would require the State Board of Elections to extend the filing deadline for a primary election if, at any time during the 48-hour period immediately preceding the filing deadline, the number of candidates from a political party is less than the number of nominations the party is allowed for the office. This bill would remedy a situation that occurred in Montgomery County in the 2022 primary, in which the central committee selected a candidate for the primary ballot after one of the three delegate candidates dropped out within hours of the filing deadline. HB643 would place responsibility for filling such ballot vacancies firmly in the hands of the citizenry, where it belongs.

In spirit and substance, this bill would expand eligible individuals' opportunity to file for elected office. By extending the filing deadline by seven days under specific limited circumstances, HB643 would help ensure that any eligible candidate has the opportunity to file for an open seat in a primary election when an unopposed candidate dies, becomes disqualified, or withdraws; and when the number of filed candidates is less than the number of nominations the political party is allowed.

HB643 would make sure that every citizen – not only party insiders – would have an equal chance to run for office when a sudden opening occurs. The proposed seven-day extension of the filing deadline would advance democracy by allowing time for adequate and widespread public notice of a last-minute opening, thus creating opportunity for



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candidates who might consider running to do so, rather than having the ballot opening filled by the political party's central committee.

We ask for your support for HB643 and strongly urge a favorable Committee report.

Respectfully,

Diana Conway
President

Fran Rothstein
Advancing Democracy in Maryland Committee