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Testimony In Support of HB 417
Special Election to Fill A Vacancy in Office

Madame Chair and Members of the Ways and Means Committee

It is good to be back in front of my old Committee. There are many new faces and many old faces in new positions. Congratulations to you all. It is a wonderful committee with lots of great content.

I am here to testify in support of HB 417. It's a great bill. I know that because I introduced it myself in 2017.

In our country we all believe that our residents should be able to elect who represents them in Congress and in the State Legislature. I also believe this should be the case when a state delegate must be chosen to fill a vacancy in the middle of a legislative term.

Thirty states in our country have special elections to fill vacancies in the state legislature. We do not have that process at the state legislative level. Special elections do happen in many of our County and Council positions.

Two of the main arguments against special elections are the additional cost to the state of having special elections and that very few people vote in special elections. My bill addresses both concerns.

HB 417 is a constitutional amendment that would go on the ballot. It would create a special election in case of a vacancy but only if it coincides with the Presidential primary and election.

It would continue the current process of the Central Committee of the party from which the vacancy was created nominating a person to be appointed by the Governor. The only difference is that if the vacancy occurs earlier than 55 days before the filing deadline in the Presidential year, there would be a special election coinciding with the Presidential primary and election dates. In those cases the appointment would last only until after the Presidential election and the candidate elected would be sworn in after the election and serve the last two years of the term. To repeat this bill relates to a vacancy that occurs in the first year of the four year legislative term.

I believe this legislation enables the residents in Maryland to have more direct say on who should be their representatives in case of a vacancy.

I've heard some of the concerns about the bill, but I believe that Democracy and elections really must trump those concerns. Many people were not happy with the Presidential results in 2016. And personally, I was not overjoyed with the primary results in District 47A in 2018. I sometimes wonder there might not be a better way to select our leaders. But overall I believe that Democratic elections are essential and is what our system is based on and that the people will make the right choices. We should have elections whenever it is possible.

I ask the Committee for a favorable vote on HB 471