



MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND
WOMEN'S DEMOCRATIC CLUB

P.O. Box 34047, Bethesda, MD 20827

www.womensdemocraticclub.org

**House Bill HB0417 General Assembly – Special Election to Fill a Vacancy in Office
Ways and Means Committee – February 14, 2023, 1:00 PM
SUPPORT**

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.

WDC urges the passage of HB0417. This bill will ensure that vacancies in the Maryland General Assembly that result from resignation, removal, or death, are filled by special election, not by vote of any party's Central Committee. Democracy requires that the people of the affected legislative district decide who represents them in government, and having a political party's Central Committee appoint an individual to such a role violates this fundamental right that all citizens should enjoy.

Currently, 28 states mandate special elections to fill vacancies in the state legislature.¹ Maryland is the only Mid-Atlantic state that does not hold special elections to fill vacancies in its state legislature. Special elections are fairer to voters and provide more competitive races since anyone can put themselves forward as a candidate, and it is up to the public to decide who will be elected. In addition, this system encourages greater participation from diverse groups within our state and ensures that our representatives accurately reflect the views of their constituents.

The Montgomery County Women's Democratic Club supports HB0417 because it ensures that every citizen has an equal chance to run for office and it further ensures that the candidate selected is the choice of the largest number of voters in the district. When the party Central Committee selects the legislative replacement, the selection reflects only the views of a small number of party officials, most of whom do not reside in the district. Special elections will restore faith in democracy and will guarantee that those legislators voted into office through a special election genuinely reflect the views of their constituents. Throughout the state, we have seen how Central Committee appointments to vacant legislative seats are quietly influenced by the district delegation and often go to members of the Central Committees themselves. Passage of HB0417 is necessary to ensure fair representation free from the influence of the most powerful voices in the district.

As of 2019, fully 20% of the General Assembly were appointed members.² That percentage will surely rise in 2023 and beyond as Governor Moore continues to appoint members of the General Assembly to key positions within his administration. The power of incumbency is strong in Maryland, since incumbent lawmakers are more able to raise money and benefit from the support of the

¹ <https://www.marylandmatters.org/2022/03/15/maryland-pirg-state-should-hold-special-elections-to-fill-vacancies-in-the-legislature/>

² <https://www.marylandmatters.org/2019/10/03/with-jackson-and-forbes-appointees-make-up-one-fifth-of-legislature/>



MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND
WOMEN'S DEMOCRATIC CLUB

P.O. Box 34047, Bethesda, MD 20827

www.womensdemocraticclub.org

Senate and House Caucus Committees. That power should not be granted by a handful of party members. Holding special elections to fill vacant seats promotes democracy, transparency, and, most importantly, faith in our political system because the power of incumbency will be granted by the will of the voters in the district. Democracy begins with each one of us. We must ensure that everyone has an equal chance of being elected to office and that our political system is free from the influence of parties.

Thank you for your consideration in supporting HB0417- Special Election to Fill a Vacancy in Office - and for taking part in restoring faith in our government. We must all work together to create a more equitable, transparent, and fair political system.

We ask for your support for HB0417 and strongly urge a favorable Committee report.

Diana E. Conway
WDC President

Liza Smith
WDC Advocacy Committee