

Testimony of Edward Fischman
(Chair – Montgomery County chapter of Our Revolution Maryland)

Testimony in Support of HB 347

Chair Atterbeary, Vice-Chair Wilkins, and the Members of the Ways and Means Committee:

I offer this testimony in support of the bill, HB 347, and thank Delegates Palakovich Carr and Griffith, for bringing this question before the House. I am testifying on behalf of Our Revolution Maryland which has been advocating for various reforms to our election and appointment rules to democratize rules which too often work to entrench and reinforce the influence of those in positions of power. In connection with this interest, members of our organization have stood for election or appointment to the county Democratic Central Committees, as well as the General Assembly, in hopes of advancing some important reforms.

I was elected to the Montgomery County Democratic Central Committee in 2022, and I have sought to promote the very reform which is the subject of HB 347. I speak for myself, and not the Committee or its members, but I think my experience in the vacancy process may be instructive, so I feel it is important to state my interest. Although I and other members of the committees can certainly benefit from the current rules which allow them to vote for themselves in a vacancy appointment, I believe it is unseemly, undemocratic, and counter-productive to the interests of the parties themselves.

Several of my colleagues on the Montgomery Central Committee joined me in this effort. Given resistance from the state party, our reform proposal failed to secure a majority vote.

Advocates for the current system earnestly maintain that prohibiting their participation in the process would somehow deprive the interested member of some essential right to vote. That fundamentally misunderstands how this is different from ANY other election. Members are uniquely positioned in comparison to other applicants, and it is indisputably a massive advantage if they get to cast one of a very small number of votes on their own behalf. It should be obvious to all that this is problematic.

Rather than infringing on one person's democratic rights, this change makes for a fairer, more democratic process for all applicants. Given that central committees are only empowered to fill vacancies because of the Constitution, it is also appropriate for the Legislature, and the people, to define the circumstance and rules for exercising that authority.

I also believe it is in the best interests of the political parties. Central committee members should be focused on party-building. While the vacancy nomination power is an important one, I believe the current system creates an incentive which may entice candidates to run for the committee for reasons other than party-building. The change proposed in HB347 is only a small tweak there, but I believe it will be an important one. It will also boost the public's perception of the integrity of the central committees.

On my own behalf, and on behalf of thousands of Our Revolution members in Maryland, I urge the committee to issue a favorable report on HB347.