



THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Testimony in Support of HB 347
General Assembly Vacancy - Political Party Central Committees -
Procedures

HB 347 would enact safeguards for the legislative appointment process when a vacancy occurs in the General Assembly. The bill would codify common-sense measures to ensure that the appointment process is transparent and inclusive of the public.

Filling a vacancy in the General Assembly is an important responsibility of the Governor and the local central committee of the same party as the departing member. Maryland's Democratic and Republican Central Committees do the difficult work of vetting applicants for legislative appointments.

Although this bill is not about any particular appointment, public trust in the process has been strained at times because of a lack of transparency, leading to concerns about undue influence and backroom deals. In order to maintain public trust, it is essential that the appointment process be carried out with transparency and integrity.

This bill is especially needed due to the extraordinarily high number of legislative vacancies that occur in our state. In the past 10 years, there have been 63 legislative vacancies in Maryland. Over that span, Maryland ranks second in the nation in the number of total vacancies in our legislature.

Given the compelling public interest in fair and transparent appointments, other states that use an appointment process have enacted requirements regarding the timeframe, public notification, public input, and voting requirements of the entity that fills the vacancy.¹

Many of the provisions of the bill, including the notice requirements, public meeting requirements, and open ballot requirements are already requirements that the Maryland Democratic Party requires of all local Democratic central committees in its by-laws. The Maryland Republican Party also already includes some elements of this bill in their

¹ For instance, Colorado, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, and North Dakota

rules. Moreover, some local central committees, including the Montgomery County Democratic Central Committee, have adopted provisions in this bill that go beyond their state party rules. HB 347 would ensure that these requirements are made uniform across the state, providing a level playing field for all individuals seeking nomination to fill a vacancy in the General Assembly, regardless of their party affiliation.

What This Bill Does

- Requires that the application period must be open and advertised for at least 7 days.
- Requires translation of the above announcement only if the county in which the central committee is located is required to translate elections materials under section 203 of the federal Voting Rights Act.
 - Currently, only Montgomery and Prince George's Counties are required to translate election materials into Spanish.
- Requires that submitted applications must be publicly posted by the Central Committee or the state party and remain posted until at least 30 days after the vote is taken.
- Requires that a public forum be held by the Central Committee to interview the candidates. For example, candidate interviews or a candidate forum.
- Requires that a meeting to fill a vacancy in office shall be accessible to the public and announced at least 3 days in advance.
- Requires that a central committee member who has applied for the vacancy has to recuse themselves from voting.
- Requires that there be no secret ballot vote—the vote has to be a roll call or use signed ballots, and the vote must take place in open session.