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Honorable Vanessa E. Atterbeary
Honorable Jheanelle K. Wilkins
House Ways and Means Committee
Room 131 House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: Request for Favorable Report HB0347, General Assembly Vacancy – Political Party Central Committees – Procedures

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

I urge the Committee to issue a favorable report on HB0347. I am providing this testimony in my personal capacity as a Maryland resident. Although I am a member of the Montgomery County Democratic Central Committee, the opinions expressed herein do not reflect the opinions of other Central Committee members; they are mine alone.

Elections are the cornerstone of a democracy which in turn is the source of our freedom as Americans. Vacancies in office are inevitable, especially during the transition from one party holding the Governorship to another party. Maryland is not unique in that regard. Members of Congress often resign to accept positions in the administration of a new President.

As a member of the Montgomery County Democratic Central Committee (MCDCC), I participated in the process of selecting nominees to fill legislative vacancies. I can personally attest to the fact that all of my colleagues took the responsibility seriously and invested significant time to get to know the applicants. While the Central Committee selected outstanding public servants to fill vacancies in the General Assembly over the past year, our democratic ideals and desire to empower citizens dictate replacement of the appointment system with special elections.

Many of the reforms contained in SB0140 have already been adopted by the MCDCC. These include widespread dissemination of the vacancy and process for applying; public meetings, district-level candidate fora, public votes, etc. The MCDCC should be acknowledged for taking these positive steps.

However, members of the Central Committee who apply to fill legislative vacancies are not required to recuse themselves from voting on filling the vacancy. The proper and honorable thing to do would be for members to recuse themselves, but it is not required. Memorializing recusal in law would increase public confidence in the appointment process and represent a positive reform.

I am a strong supporter of special elections because the best way to fill vacancies is through elections. There are other bills pending before the General Assembly that reform the process for filling vacancies and all of them are an improvement over the current appointment process. If special elections cannot be implemented this year, then passage of HB0347 is a positive initial step.

I want to thank Delegate Palakovich Carr for her leadership on this issue and urge the Committee to favorably report HB0347.



Jayson L. Spiegel
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