

Good morning Chair Feldman and Vice Chair Kagan. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on this important issue. My name is Andrew Saundry and I am submitting this in a personal capacity as resident of District 15.

Filling vacancies in the Maryland General Assembly is a challenging process and well-intentioned Legislators, activists, and Central Committee-members may disagree about the strengths and weaknesses of different approaches. Of course, we recognize that there is no substitute for a duly elected member of the General Assembly completing the term to which they were selected by the residents of their district, but such vacancies do occur from time to time and no method of filling them is flawless. The legislation before you today is a meaningful improvement on the status quo.

As I know you all are already aware, there are two significant schools of thought on the best way to handle these vacancies:

Advocates of replacing appointments with special elections in all cases (as happens in Virginia) argue that the current appointments process is not participatory and, thusly, does not adequately reflect the will of the voters. In Montgomery County (and the majority of counties across Maryland), the Central Committees are composed of individuals from across the county, only a small minority of whom reside in the affected district. These Committee members were chosen primarily not by the residents of the district to make such a decision on their behalf, but by the residents of several other districts. No such system, they contend, can be representative of the interests or perspectives of that district.

Advocates of an appointments system respond that the current process is more affordable for the State and lowers barriers of entry for candidates who may have a harder time running in a special election due to costs, disability, age, or work requirements. These advocates argue that under the current system, the delegation has become more diverse, while also ensuring the elevation of qualified, experienced, and knowledgeable legislators. Opponents of off-cycle special elections cite the low turnout numbers and high expenses for special elections at abnormal times.

SB2 strikes a perfect balance between these schools of thought—retaining the benefits of the current system while addressing the chief concern of special elections advocates by creating a mechanism for direct voter feedback—by creating special elections in Presidential election years for appointees who are selected in the first two years of a term. Because this is concurrent with a presidential election, it will not cost the state more to administer and it will keep open the path for candidates who may have a difficult time competing in a special election. This proposal enables appointees to serve for up to two sessions before facing an election, while giving the voters an opportunity to make their voices heard about that appointee and their legislative record as well as the decision of the Central Committee.

This is a complex issue and I thank Senator Kagan and Delegate Foley for bringing folks together to improve the process in the most effective way possible at this time.

I urge a favorable recommendation. Thank you!!