



Maryland Forward Party

February 3, 2025

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SB 0171:

Ensuring Transparency and Fairness in Filling Vacancies

Dear Committee,

I am writing to you today on behalf of The Maryland Forward Party and our thousands of dedicated members to express our support for an amended version of this bill SB171. Since the most recent election, we have seen an extraordinary surge in membership requests—far surpassing our expectations. While we take immense pride in the dedication, outreach, and hard work of our existing members, it is evident that the primary factor driving this influx is the growing frustration among voters with the current political system. Marylanders are seeking real alternatives and meaningful reforms, and many are turning to Forward Maryland as a fresh, solutions-driven movement that prioritizes the needs of the people over partisan interests.

One of the most pressing concerns of our membership since the start of this year's session is reforming the current process for filling vacancies in the Maryland General Assembly. We strongly believe that special elections should replace the existing appointment system. When in doubt we trust democracy. Special elections ensure that voters have the power to choose their representatives. However, as a pragmatic and solutions-oriented party, we recognize the need for compromise in the pursuit of progress. SB171 represents that incremental



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progress. The Maryland Forward Party has made the calculation that if SB171 represents the only viable path to electoral reform this legislative session, then we are prepared to support its passage to start moving Maryland in the direction of electoral reform.

SB 171 strengthens the process for filling vacancies in the Maryland General Assembly by ensuring greater transparency, public involvement, and accountability. Here are the key reasons why this bill is important to our members:

1. Increased Transparency: The bill mandates that all application processes and central committee meetings be open to the public. Central committees will be required to hold public meetings to interview applicants, ensuring that the process is visible to the public and the media, not conducted behind closed doors.
2. Clear Application Process: SB 171 requires central committees to advertise the vacancy filling process, including the timeline, how to apply, and the specific steps involved. This clear structure guarantees that the public is informed and has an opportunity to participate in the process.
3. Promotes Accountability: By requiring a public roll call vote or signed ballots when central committees select appointees, the bill ensures that the process is fair and accountable. Additionally, central committee members who apply for the vacancy must recuse themselves from any part of the process, eliminating conflicts of interest.
4. Inclusivity and Accessibility: The bill includes provisions to ensure that the application process is accessible to non-English speakers, in line with federal law. If necessary, vacancy notices will be translated into languages spoken by the local community, helping to ensure everyone has an equal chance to participate.



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5. Encourages Local Involvement: By requiring a minimum of seven days for applications and ensuring that materials are posted online for 30 days after the vote, SB 171 encourages greater local engagement in the political process, giving people ample time to learn about the vacancy and apply if they're interested.

While SB172 proposes measures to close certain unpopular loopholes in existing law, we can only fully support SB2 at this time. SB2 offers a straightforward and effective solution by granting the Governor the authority to declare a vacancy and call for a special election to be held concurrently with the next statewide or general election. This approach ensures that vacancies in the Maryland General Assembly are filled in the most democratic, efficient, and transparent manner, again giving voters—not political insiders—the ultimate say in who represents them.

In closing, SB 171 promotes a fairer, more inclusive, and accountable process for filling vacancies in the General Assembly, ensuring that the decision-making process is transparent and accessible to all Marylanders. Supporting this bill strengthens the democratic process and enhances trust in how political appointments are made.

Respectfully

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