

# **2025 SB0171 Testimony For 2025-02-05.pdf**

Uploaded by: Alan Lang

Position: FAV

**SB0171 – General Assembly Vacancy – Favorable**

Honorable Senators

I support this bill.

I believe the Republican Central Committee for Anne Arundel County followed or took similar actions when selecting a replacement for the vacant District 31 seat,

Please enter a Favorable decision.

Alan Lang  
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Legislative District 30B

February 5, 2025

# **SB0171\_General\_Assembly\_Vacancies\_Central\_Committe**

Uploaded by: Cecilia Plante

Position: FAV



## **TESTIMONY FOR SB0171**

### **General Assembly Vacancy – Political Party Central Committees - Procedures**

**Bill Sponsor:** Senator Lam

**Committee:** Education, Energy, and the Environment

**Organization Submitting:** Maryland Legislative Coalition

**Person Submitting:** Cecilia Plante, co-chair

**Position:** FAVORABLE

I am submitting this testimony in favor of SB0171 on behalf of the Maryland Legislative Coalition. The Maryland Legislative Coalition is an association of activists - individuals and grassroots groups in every district in the state. We are unpaid citizen lobbyists, and our Coalition supports well over 30,000 members.

The Central Committees of the Democratic and Republican parties play an outsize role in nominating individuals for legislative positions in the General Assembly whenever there is a vacancy. Due to past vacancies, there are a considerable number of Delegates and Senators who have essentially been elected by the Central Committee rather than by their constituents.

The process of nominating a candidate for the Governor to fill a vacant position is not a particularly transparent one. This bill seeks to remedy that problem by requiring that the Central Committee provide public notice that they are accepting applications and that they hold the application period open for at least 7 days. They must also publicly advertise any meetings that they will have on the vacancy and post any applications online. Their meetings on the vacancy must be open to the public. Finally, any member of the Central Committee that has applied for the vacancy must abstain from voting. This is just how a democratic process should work.

Nominees for legislative positions should not be voted on behind closed doors. This process directly affects the constituents of the district that the vacancy is in, and they should be able to see and participate in that process.

We support this bill and recommend a **FAVORABLE** report in committee

# **Fischman Vacancy Reform SB 171 Testimony.pdf**

Uploaded by: Edward Fischman

Position: FAV

**Edward Fischman - Testimony in Support of SB 171 --**  
(Chair, Montgomery County chapter of Our Revolution MD)

Chair Feldman, Vice-Chair Kagan, and Members of the Education, Energy and Environment Committee:

I offer this testimony in support of bill, SB 171 and thank Senator Lam for his steadfast resolve in once again bringing this question before the Senate.

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. I have sought to promote the very reform which is the subject of HB 237. I speak for myself, not the MCDCC or its members, but I think my experience in the vacancy process may be instructive.

Members of central committees can certainly benefit from the current rules which allow them to vote for themselves in a vacancy appointment, but I believe it is undemocratic, unseemly, and counterproductive to the interests of the parties themselves. Several of my colleagues on the Montgomery Central Committee joined me in efforts to implement our own reform, but facing resistance from the state party, our reform proposal failed to secure a majority vote. Even still, by voicing our concerns, we influenced our members to voluntarily recuse from voting on a vacancy if they have applied to fill that vacancy.

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.

Being able to vote on the vacancy recommendation, members are uniquely positioned in comparison to other applicants. 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, the proposed reform makes for a fairer, more democratic process for all applicants.

Given that central committees are only empowered to fill vacancies through the Constitution, it is appropriate for the Assembly and the people, to define circumstances and rules for exercising that authority.

I believe reform is in the best interests of the political parties. Central committee members should be focused on party-building. In my opinion, 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 SB 171 only a small tweak there, but I believe it will boost the public's perception of the process and 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 SB 171.

# **Testimony SB0171.pdf**

Uploaded by: Liza Smith

Position: FAV



## Testimony in Support of SB0171

From: Liza Smith, Member, Montgomery County Democratic Central Committee, District 14

Position: SUPPORT

Honorable Members of the Education, Energy, and Environment Committee,

I am Liza Smith, a member of the Montgomery County Democratic Central Committee for District 14, and I fully endorse Senate Bill SB0171. I am pleased to express my strong support for this bill, which addresses critical deficiencies in Maryland's current process for appointing individuals to fill vacancies in the General Assembly. By establishing clear requirements for procedures such as applications, public notice, public meetings, and voting, SB0171 promotes transparency, accountability, and fairness in the selection of candidates to serve our communities.

One key provision of this bill is the mandate that central committee members who have applied for a vacancy must recuse themselves from voting on the individual chosen to fill that vacancy. This measure ensures the integrity of the selection process and mitigates conflicts of interest, thereby upholding public trust and safeguarding against undue influence.

It is encouraging to note that SB0171 has received bipartisan support from both Republicans and Democrats, highlighting its importance in promoting good governance and fostering a

more inclusive and equitable political environment. I urge all members of the General Assembly to swiftly pass this essential legislation for the betterment of our democracy and the constituents we serve.

Thank you for your attention and dedication to upholding the democratic values that define our great state of Maryland.

Sincerely,

Liza Smith  
Member, Montgomery County Democratic Central Committee,  
District 14

# **SB171 General Assembly Vacancy - Political Party C**

Uploaded by: Nikki Tyree

Position: FAV



## **TESTIMONY TO THE SENATE EDUCATION, ENERGY, AND THE ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE**

### **SB 171 General Assembly Vacancy - Political Party Central Committees - Procedures**

**Position: Favorable with Amendments**

**By: Linda T. Kohn, President**

**Date: February 5, 2025**

The League of Women Voters of Maryland supports Senate Bill 171, requiring transparency in the process of selecting a candidate to fill a seat in the General Assembly when it is left vacant by the Central Committees.

Since 1985, the League of Women Voters has supported additional statewide standards regulating the central committee nominating process to fill legislative vacancies, public notice of meetings within the vacated district for public input, the public announcement of candidates prior to that meeting, and a publicly recorded vote of each committee member. SB 171 would support this position.

With Maryland having such a high rate of appointed legislators creating a transparent process of how those who are appointed would allow voters to know who is representing them and allow them to participate in public meetings before the appointment.

LWVMD would respectfully request an amendment to this bill that would ensure when a name is put forth for an appointment, along with their application, there shall be a disclosure to attest to how the candidate may know any member who sits on the committee in a professional or personal capacity.

Since 1985, the League of Women Voters of Maryland has supported the use of special elections to fill vacancies in the office of Senator or Delegate. We strongly believe that legislative representatives should be selected by their constituents rather than potentially serve nearly a full four-year term based on appointment by the Governor. While SB 171 does not allow for special elections, LWVMD is pleased that it shows a positive step in that direction and creates more transparency around the process.

We urge a favorable report, with LWVMD's proposed amendment, on SB 171.

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# **Testimony in support of SB0171 - General Assembly**

Uploaded by: Richard KAP Kaplowitz

Position: FAV

SB0171\_RichardKaplowitz\_FAV  
02/05/2025

Richard Keith Kaplowitz  
Frederick, MD 21703

**TESTIMONY ON SB#0171 - FAVORABLE**  
**General Assembly Vacancy - Political Party Central Committees – Procedures**

**TO:** Chair Atterbeary, Vice Chair Wilkins, and members of the Ways and Means Committee

**FROM:** Richard Keith Kaplowitz

**My name is Richard K. Kaplowitz. I am a resident of District 3. I am submitting this testimony in support of SB#0171 General Assembly Vacancy - Political Party Central Committees – Procedures**

Elections are held so that the voters can pick who should represent their interest in Annapolis. However, when a delegate or senator leaves their position, it falls to the Central Committee of that representative's party to pick a successor. This bill attempts to make the process more open and permit the involvement of the affected voters working in concert with that Central Committee. In 2024, Statewide, 23% of the 188-member General Assembly first acquired their seats through appointment: 20% of the 141-person House of Delegates and one-third of the 47-member state Senate, according to figures published this past October by Common Cause

This bill is an attempt to make the process of choosing the successor more public and stops a committee member from being able to vote themselves into the office. It is a good step towards correcting that situation and returning us to a state where the voters pick their leaders, not their leaders picking themselves or their friends to serve in the General Assembly.

**I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report on SB#0171.**

# **SB 0171 - Maryland Forward Party.pdf**

Uploaded by: Philip Benenati

Position: FWA





# Maryland Forward Party

February 3, 2025

## Maryland Forward Party

PJ Benenati, Chair

(301) 606-3513

pjbenenatimdfwd@gmail.com

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



# Maryland Forward Party

February 3, 2025

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.



# Maryland Forward Party

February 3, 2025

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

PJ Benenati

Maryland Forward Party, Chair

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