

Dear Madam Chair and Vice Chair,

I am writing to express my support for Linda Foley's sponsored bill, HB 174, which seeks to change the process of filling vacancies in our legislature from appointments by central committees to special elections.

In the past four years, we have seen an unprecedented number of delegates and senators vacate their positions for various reasons. Unfortunately, their seats have been filled by appointments rather than special elections. As a result, approximately one-third of our Montgomery County Delegation is now made up of appointed officials.

This process does not reflect a free or fair election. Appointed delegates and senators are automatically granted incumbent status, giving them an approximate 80% chance of being elected, which creates a significant advantage over potential challengers. This advantage distorts the democratic process and limits opportunities for new candidates to run on a level playing field. Meanwhile, their counterparts who were elected must raise funds and put in the work to run a first time campaign, which the appointed person did not, this seems inherently unfair.

I understand that at one point in our county's history, appointments were rare and, in some cases, helped promote a more diverse electorate. However, this is no longer the case. Today, appointed officials hold a considerable advantage, and the system now bears more resemblance to a political structure found in autocratic regimes than in a democracy like Maryland and the United States. As a Democrat, I find this situation unacceptable, and I can no longer remain silent.

I urge you to vote HB 174 out of committee to ensure that the people of Maryland have access to free and fair elections, as they deserve.

Sincerely,

Julie M Statland

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