

BILL NUMBER HB 0174

BILL TITLE: Special Election to Fill a Vacancy in Office

POSITION: Favorable



January 24, 2025

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB174

To the Honorable Chair Vanessa Atterbeary, Vice Chair Wilkins, and Members of the Ways & Means Committee:

On behalf of Ranked Choice Voting (RCV) Maryland, we support HB 174 which would reform the current process of filling General Assembly vacancies, ensuring voters have an opportunity to elect the leaders who represent their interests in Annapolis.

Our coalition recognizes that ensuring representation is critical in all aspects of our democratic process – from how we vote to how we fill vacancies in elected office.

It is clear that the general public has little to no input in the selection process when a vacancy occurs in the General Assembly. While we recognize the role political parties play in providing a nominee recommendation to the Governor, our current process excludes unaffiliated voters and the voices of others out of the decision making for someone who is there to represent the interests of the district.

One in five Maryland legislators were initially appointed, rather than elected, using this undemocratic process. We value the work and commitment of the legislators who were appointed through this process. **This is not about the person, it is about the process.** We must give voters in a district a voice in the process. It will create greater trust and confidence in state government.

HB 174 would improve the current process by requiring that special elections be held to fill these vacated seats if the vacancy occurs prior to the candidate filing deadline. While not a perfect solution, this is a step towards a more democratic process. Twenty-nine states have some sort of special elections process for replacing legislative vacancies. Maryland must do the same.

HB 174 is a straightforward bill that begins to shift the power to fill legislative vacancies from the executive to the voters of Maryland, and for that reason we urge a favorable report.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michelle Whittaker".

Michelle Whittaker
Executive Director
Ranked Choice Voting Maryland