

Committee: Government, Labor, and Elections
Testimony on: HB 50 General Assembly –
Special Election to Fill a Vacancy in Office
Position: FAVORABLE
Hearing Date: February 4, 2026

Chair Wells, Vice Chair Kerr, and distinguished Members of this Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today.

My name is Dr. David Weinberg, and I am writing to you in my capacity as a Policy Strategist for Protect Democracy United, a cross-partisan 501(c)(4) that seeks to strengthen the representative institutions of our system of government. I am also a proud Maryland resident.

Protect Democracy United encourages you to issue a favorable report on House Bill 50.

This bill for a constitutional amendment would incrementally but meaningfully strengthen Maryland's democracy. Because after all, what is a democracy but a system of government in which the voters get to choose their leaders? And yet in each of the chambers of our state legislature, more than one in four lawmakers originally came to their position by being appointed instead of being chosen by the voters.

We have become accustomed to this practice because it's how things have historically been done, but that doesn't mean it's how we should continue to operate here in the Free State. Especially at a time when our nation's democracy is under such severe pressure, we should aspire to set the best possible example for the rest of the country.

This bill is also important for mitigating apathy toward civic participation, especially among our youth. If we want the next generation to believe that democracy is the right form of government for our state and for our nation, we should ensure that voters are the ones who get to choose their elected representatives whenever possible.

This bill strikes a reasonable balance between those ideals and real-world practicalities, minimizing the burden on our hardworking election officials as well as on our taxpayers by only holding such special elections every four years, on a preexisting election date. And it still leaves open a pathway to better representation for underrepresented communities through the appointment process, since it would only trigger a special election for vacancies that arise well before the middle of a four-year term.

The Senate has sent versions of this bill to the House for four out of the last five years.

But the cost of failing to act this year would be higher than usual. If the General Assembly finally sends this referendum to voters this November, Maryland can hold its first such special elections to fill legislative vacancies in 2028. Otherwise, that won't be possible until 2032 – at the earliest.

For these reasons, we hope you will issue a favorable report on HB 50. Thank you for your consideration.

For more information, contact:

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ABOUT US

Protect Democracy United is a nonpartisan, nonprofit group working to prevent American democracy from declining into a more authoritarian form of government.