

The Office of Jake Taylor, Bel Air Town Commissioner

39 N. Hickory Ave.

Bel Air, MD 21014

Senate Committee on Education, Energy, and the Environment,

House Committee on Government, Labor, and Elections

90 State Circle

Annapolis, MD 21401



UNFAVORABLE TESTIMONY RE: HB2100 - Election Districts - General Assembly and Representatives in Congress

Honorable Committee Members,

I write to you today to urge the defeat of HB2100, a measure to amend the Constitution by creating a two-tiered system for Maryland's legislative districts: one governed by fairness and constitutionality, and the other by partisan politics.

I write both as a private citizen whose rights and representation would be negatively affected by this wrong-headed measure, and as the elected representative of a small town which would be equally affected.

When the Governor's Redistricting Advisory Commission met in November, I testified on behalf of myself and my community that the attempt to disenfranchise the residents of the Eastern Shore and Harford County is a blatant attack on our right to self-government and representation as a region. That remains true.

Now, not only do we stare down the possibility of having our representation stripped from us, but our legislators consider repealing the very provision of the Maryland Constitution which guarantees that representation. This provision, which calls for compact districts that protect communities of interest, is no dangling participle. It is an integral part of the framework by which Maryland is meant to redistrict. Further, it is the direct fruit of the Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution and its guarantee that all Americans are entitled to equal protection under the law and that equal protection within the context of our electoral process means "one man, one vote" and that this principle ought not to be diluted by depriving communities of their preferred representatives.

The process in November was rushed. This process has been even more so. Within only four days between the publication of this amendment and its public hearing, the people of Maryland have not been given adequate time to properly inspect this amendment and consider the far-reaching implications that it would have on the right of each Marylander to cast a ballot in a free and fair election.

Our constituents deal now with a rising cost of living, increased taxes and fees, and skyrocketing energy bills. As we sit here during the hottest days of the year, I am deeply disturbed by the legislature's focus on consolidating political power as opposed to using the majorities they already wield to deliver relief to suffering Marylanders.

The Maryland Constitution is written to protect communities of interest from the ulterior motives of politicians. While not always perfect in application, the removal of this provision would open the floodgates to a level of gerrymandering previously unseen in Maryland's sordid redistricting history. Over the years, our neighbors have made plain their views on this pernicious political practice: they oppose it entirely.

I urge you to reject this amendment, which would remove yet another brick from the already unsteady wall separating Maryland's constitutionally mandated republican form of government from autocratic one-party rule.

On behalf of myself and my community, I urge you to vote to preserve our constitutional rights as citizens of Maryland and vote No on HB2100.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Jake Taylor", with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending from the end of the name across the top of the signature block.

Jake Taylor, Bel Air Town Commissioner