

Opposition Testimony on HB2100

Special Session, August 3, 2026

Bill: HB2100 / SB2100 - Election Districts - General Assembly and Representatives

Position: Unfavorable

Committee: House Government, Labor, and Elections Committee / Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

Submitted by: Frank Gunsallus, Easton, Maryland

Opening Statement

I am writing to express my strong opposition to HB2100, which would amend the Maryland Constitution to remove the requirements for compact, contiguous congressional districts that respect natural boundaries and political subdivisions. As a former Town Council President of Easton and a current candidate for Talbot County Council, I have seen firsthand how district boundaries affect the quality of representation that communities receive. This legislation is not a technical clarification. It is a deliberate attempt to strip constitutional protections against partisan gerrymandering from congressional redistricting, and it should be rejected.

This Bill Removes Existing Constitutional Protections

The Maryland Constitution currently requires that districts consist of adjoining territory, be compact in form, and give due regard to natural boundaries and the boundaries of political subdivisions. These requirements exist for a simple and important reason: they prevent the drawing of districts designed solely to maximize partisan advantage at the expense of coherent representation.

In 2022, the courts upheld these constitutional requirements when they struck down a proposed congressional map as a product of extreme partisan gerrymandering. That ruling affirmed what Marylanders already know: the constitution's redistricting standards apply to congressional districts, not just legislative ones.

HB2100 does not improve upon these standards. It removes them from congressional redistricting entirely. By clarifying that the compactness, contiguity, and boundary requirements apply only to General Assembly districts, this bill would create a constitutional vacuum for congressional districts, one in which the only constraint is federal population equality. That is not reform. It is the removal of a guardrail.

The Purpose Is Partisan, Not Procedural

Let us be honest about what this bill is designed to accomplish. The sponsors and supporters of HB2100 have made no secret of their goal: to draw a congressional map that eliminates the only Republican-held seat in Maryland and produces an 8-0 Democratic delegation. This is not about fairness or good governance. It is about using a constitutional amendment to override a court ruling that stood in the way of a one-party map.

If the roles were reversed, and a Republican supermajority proposed removing constitutional barriers to gerrymandering, the outcry would be immediate and justified. Gerrymandering is wrong regardless of which party benefits from it. A constitutional amendment that weakens protections against gerrymandering is a step backward for democracy in Maryland, no matter the partisan intent.

Eastern Shore and Rural Voters Stand to Lose the Most

I am a resident of Talbot County on the Eastern Shore, and I served as Town Council President of Easton. The Eastern Shore has a distinct identity, economy, and set of interests that differ from the Western Shore. The current compactness and boundary requirements help ensure that our congressional districts respect these geographic and cultural realities.

If HB2100 passes, there will be no state constitutional barrier to drawing a congressional district that stretches from Ocean City to Baltimore City, or from the Eastern Shore to the D.C. suburbs, simply to capture enough Democratic voters to flip a seat. This would dilute the representation of Eastern Shore residents and rural

communities across the state, submerging our interests in districts designed for partisan outcomes rather than coherent communities of interest.

This Is Being Rushed Through a Three-Day Special Session

A constitutional amendment is the most significant change a legislature can make to the state's foundational document. HB2100 is being considered in a special session lasting only three days, with a single committee hearing on the first day. The public has had barely more than a week to review the bill language, and oral testimony is limited to 50 speakers at two minutes each.

Having served in local government, I understand that some decisions require time and public input to get right. Amending the Maryland Constitution to remove protections against gerrymandering deserves more deliberation than this. It deserves full committee hearings, public input across the state, and time for Marylanders to understand what is being proposed. Ramming it through in three days is not how you build public trust in the redistricting process.

The Ballot Referendum Does Not Justify the Process

Supporters will argue that voters will have the final say in November. That is true, but it does not excuse the legislature from its responsibility to propose constitutional amendments thoughtfully and transparently. The voters will see a ballot question asking whether certain standards in the Maryland Constitution should apply only to General Assembly districts. That phrasing does not clearly convey to the average voter that they are removing protections against partisan gerrymandering from congressional districts. The amendment is being framed as a clarification, when it is functionally a removal of a constitutional guardrail.

Conclusion

I urge the committees to give HB2100 an unfavorable report. Maryland's current constitutional standards for compactness, contiguity, and respect for natural and political

boundaries serve all Marylanders, regardless of party. Removing those standards from congressional redistricting to enable a partisan map is not in the public interest. It is in the interest of a political party.

Maryland should be working to strengthen protections against gerrymandering, not weakening them. I ask you to reject this amendment and preserve the constitutional standards that have served our state well.

Respectfully submitted,

Frank Gunsallus IV

Easton, Maryland

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