

Testimony of Michael DeLong in Support of HB 50-Constitutional Amendment-Special Election to Fill a Vacancy in Office

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Michael DeLong
Silver Spring, MD 20910

Chair Wells, Vice Chair Kerr, members of the Government, Labor, and Elections Committee:

My name is Michael DeLong and I urge your support for HB 50, which would establish special elections to fill legislative vacancies in the Maryland House of Delegates and Senate. This bill is an important reform that will change the process for filling these vacancies, resulting in an expansion of democracy and enabling voters to choose who represents them.

I am a resident of Silver Spring, Maryland, and have been active in local politics and advocacy for the last ten years. Until recently, I was the President of the Montgomery County Young Democrats, where I worked to get young people involved in politics and advocacy. I believe that HB 50 will especially help with this goal.

Currently if a lawmaker leaves and there is a legislative vacancy, local county committees of a political party (either Democratic or Republican, depending on the legislator's party) choose someone to fill that vacancy. The governor then appoints the person chosen to fill the seat. If an incoming governor appoints a bunch of legislators to various executive positions, a substantial number of Delegates or Senators can be appointed instead of elected. In fact, it is possible for someone to be appointed early in a term and serve three years as a legislator without being elected by the voters.

Elections are an essential part of democracy—the people must have the right to choose their leaders and their representatives. A whole bunch of government watchdog groups have been urging the Legislature to pass reforms and give voters the power to fill vacancies, especially when a legislator leaves early in a new term. At the same time, special elections cost money and at a time when Maryland is facing budget issues, we should be careful about our spending.

HB 50 is an excellent compromise: it proposes a constitutional amendment that gives voters additional power and expands democracy. Under this amendment, a new legislator who is appointed in the first half of the Legislature's four year term will face the

voters in a special election that will take place in the term's second year. A special primary election and a special general election will take place at the same time as the regular primary and the regular general election. If the Legislature approves the amendment, it will go before the voters as a 2026 ballot question, and if the voters approve it, the first potential special elections could happen in 2028.

Central committees will retain their opportunities for input under this proposal. They will still evaluate and choose replacements that will fill legislative vacancies, but special elections will give voters their voice. And holding special legislative elections in conjunction with already scheduled elections neutralizes any problems with additional costs.

By enacting this bill, the Legislature can strengthen democracy, increase voter participation in choosing their legislators, and promote accountability for both central committees and appointed legislators. I thank Delegate Foley for her sponsorship of the bill and her hard work and urge a favorable vote on HB 50.

Please contact me at michaeldelong94@gmail.com with any questions. Thank you!

Michael DeLong