

Written Testimony - HB 1141 Municipal Incorporation - County Commissioners or County Council - Required Approval of Referendum Request

Position: Favorable

Submitted by: Heather Cantos

Hearing Date: February 26, 2026

Dear Chair Delegate Wells, Vice Chair Delegate Kerr, and Members of the Committee,

I am writing in support of HB 1141 as a community advocate and volunteer who cares about the long-term stability and fairness of how we govern our communities. I believe this bill makes the process of municipal incorporation fairer, more transparent, and grounded in community support.

For years, one community in Harford County has demonstrated the need for reform: Edgewood, Maryland. Edgewood is a diverse, vibrant, and long established community of about 25,000 residents, larger than both the City of Aberdeen and the Town of Bel Air. Yet it remains unincorporated and without a voice in decisions that directly affect its residents' quality of life.

Edgewood's efforts to incorporate are not new. Community leaders have tried since the 1990s to form a municipality in response to the lack of concern for local needs by the county's elected leadership. In 1997, a petition from Edgewood residents seeking incorporation was formally rejected by the Harford County Council. More recently, state legislators have brought incorporation proposals to Annapolis, hoping to shift the balance of authority so that county councils cannot unilaterally block incorporation attempts. This history illustrates how Maryland's current system can prevent communities from accessing a fair path to municipal incorporation. Many residents now feel that their tax dollars are collected by the county but not always invested back into the neighborhoods at the levels they need and deserve.

HB 1141 addresses this imbalance by adding provisions that if at least 40% of registered voters in a proposed area sign a referendum request, the county council must approve and specify by resolution that a vote on the incorporation shall be held at the next general election. That change respects when local voices are in agreement, while still maintaining procedural standards for referendums that reach the current 20/25% thresholds. It would mean that communities like Edgewood no longer face a system that allows county officials to be the final gatekeepers even when widespread public support exists. The 40% threshold demands real engagement like conversations at kitchen tables, at community meetings, and across neighborhoods, and means that communities like Edgewood no longer face a system that allows county officials to be the final gatekeepers even when widespread public support exists.

The bill also reinforces the need for clear fiscal planning that is necessary not just for smart governing, but also to bring such a large section of the population to a consensus. Before residents are asked to vote, they would receive straightforward information about projected revenues, service responsibilities, tax impacts, and how incorporation would affect both the new municipality and the remaining county. This prevents rushed or narrowly developed proposals

while still preserving the right of residents to pursue self-governance if there is genuine consensus.

I support HB 1141 because it ensures that when such a significant step is taken, it is done deliberately, responsibly, and with full community awareness. This change is not only reasonable, it is essential here in Harford County.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge a favorable report on House Bill 1141.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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