

**Testimony to the Maryland House of Delegates
in Favor of HB0488
Tuesday, January 27th, 2026**

My name is Maria Pekala and I am a resident of Montgomery County. Thank you for this opportunity to testify in favor of HB0488, which will both strengthen the voices of Maryland citizens in Congress and help save our Democracy. Here is why I support this bill and ask you to pass it.

First, this selected map represents the will of the majority of Maryland citizens. It incorporates public feedback presented by advocates over the course of many months through the GRAC process. The people have spoken. Please listen.

Second, it strengthens community representation, particularly for water-based communities, Baltimore City, the Capital Region, where I live, and fast-growing economic corridors. This map helps people with common concerns be better represented by joining them together so that their representatives can better understand and protect their interests.

Third, and most importantly right now, after we have seen what unchecked power is doing in Minneapolis, but also here in our own State of Maryland, it helps stave off autocracy and maintain our ability as regular citizens — Democrats AND Republicans — to have a say in our lives, i.e. it helps rebuild our Democratic Republic.

To the Republican Delegates in this House, please do the right thing. Think of what it means to have a government that

guns citizens down in the street and then says, “we did that because he had a gun.” You for years have supported the right to legally carry a weapon. If this autocratic government is allowed to do what it did in Minneapolis, there is no stopping it.

Your Republican colleagues in Congress have been too timid to act. So we need to make sure Maryland elects people who can stand up to autocrats who will stop at nothing to get their way. And who will eventually come after anyone — regardless of party — just because they can.

But you must have the courage to act here first. You can save us by passing this bill, and adopting maps for the 2026, 2028, and 2030 elections to give certainty to voters and communities across the state. By doing so, you will be the heroes that Maryland, and all of America, need right now.

My parents, Maria Cercola and Michele Alongi, grew up in a fascist state and suffered because of it. They and their friends would only rarely talk about their experiences in front of us children. But let me tell you: what they and their friends described is what we are seeing now, here, in the United States.

Because of what I heard from my parents, I chose a career in national security. I worked for the Office of the Secretary of Defense at NATO in the early days of the Partnership for Peace and set up seminars for the countries of the former Warsaw Pact on what it means to have civilian and democratic control of the military. I regret to say we are losing

this here in the US. If you don't believe me, listen to historians like Timothy Snyder and Heather Cox Richardson.

It's time to act. Please be heroes today and pass HB0488.

Thank you.