

Written Testimony

In Opposition to House Bill 488

Maryland General Assembly

Bill: HB 488

Position: OPPOSE

Submitted by: Michael Phillips

Affiliation: Maryland resident

Introduction

I respectfully submit this testimony in opposition to **House Bill 488**, which proposes changes to Maryland's congressional redistricting process under the banner of reform but, in practice, risks **entrenching partisan advantage, weakening public trust, and undermining representative democracy**.

Maryland's redistricting history already suffers from a credibility problem. HB 488 does not meaningfully correct that problem—it risks deepening it.

HB 488 Fails to Address Maryland's Core Redistricting Problem

Maryland is widely recognized as one of the **most aggressively gerrymandered states in the nation**. The state's current congressional map was designed to maximize partisan outcomes rather than reflect geographic, community, or political realities.

HB 488 does not impose **binding, enforceable standards** that would prevent future maps from being manipulated for partisan gain. Instead, it preserves broad discretion for political actors while offering procedural changes that give the appearance of reform without delivering substantive safeguards.

Without strict, objective criteria—such as compactness requirements, limits on partisan data use, and protections for communities of interest—HB 488 leaves Maryland vulnerable to continued map abuse.

Process Without Independence Is Not Reform

True redistricting reform requires **independence from political self-interest**. HB 488 fails this test.

The bill does not establish a genuinely independent redistricting body insulated from legislative and executive influence. Any process controlled or influenced by sitting political actors—who directly benefit from the maps they approve—cannot credibly claim neutrality.

Marylanders across the political spectrum deserve a process where **politicians do not choose their voters**.

The Bill Risks Further Legal and Institutional Damage

Maryland's last redistricting cycle resulted in **judicial rejection** of a congressional map for being unconstitutional partisan gerrymandering. HB 488 does not materially reduce the likelihood of similar outcomes in the future.

By failing to impose clear guardrails, the bill risks:

- Renewed litigation
- Increased taxpayer expense
- Further erosion of public confidence in state institutions

A redistricting framework that repeatedly ends up in court is not a sustainable or legitimate system.

Public Trust Is Already Low—HB 488 Makes It Worse

At a time when confidence in democratic institutions is fragile, Maryland should be pursuing **maximum transparency, neutrality, and restraint**. Instead, HB 488 appears designed to protect political advantage while asking the public to trust a process that has repeatedly failed them.

This is not merely a partisan concern. Gerrymandering harms:

- Voter confidence
- Electoral competition
- Policy accountability

When districts are engineered outcomes, elections stop being meaningful.

What Real Reform Would Require

If the General Assembly is serious about redistricting reform, it should pursue:

- **A truly independent redistricting commission**
- Clear, enforceable standards prioritizing compactness and communities of interest
- Prohibitions on using partisan voting data to shape districts
- Judically reviewable criteria with real consequences for violations

HB 488 does none of these things adequately.

Conclusion

House Bill 488 does not represent genuine redistricting reform. It preserves the same incentives and power structures that produced Maryland's current problems while offering procedural changes that fail to protect voters.

For the sake of democratic legitimacy, public trust, and fair representation, I respectfully urge the committee to **issue an unfavorable report on HB 488**.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony.

Regards,



Michael Phillips