

Witness Testimony Against Maryland HB0488

Testimony of Nicole Ewing, Resident of Cordova, Maryland

Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Nicole Ewing, and I am a resident of Cordova, Maryland, in Talbot County on the Eastern Shore. I live in a small rural community of about 500 people, where we cherish our agricultural heritage, our connection to the Chesapeake Bay, and our independent way of life. As a registered voter in Maryland's 1st Congressional District, I have seen how redistricting decisions impact our representation, and I am here today to strongly oppose HB0488, titled "Election Districts - General Assembly and Representatives in Congress." This bill, which alters our congressional districts mid-decade, represents a blatant attempt at partisan gerrymandering that would dilute the voices of Eastern Shore residents like me, undermine fair representation, and erode trust in our democratic process.

Under the current maps, drawn after the 2020 census and upheld through judicial review, the 1st District unites the Eastern Shore with similar rural and coastal communities, allowing our representative to advocate effectively for issues that matter to us—such as farming subsidies, bay restoration, flood protection, and small business support. HB0488 would redraw these lines before the next census, connecting parts of the Shore to urban and suburban areas in Howard and Anne Arundel counties, which have vastly different priorities and demographics. This isn't about fairness or population shifts; it's a calculated move to flip the district for partisan gain, potentially turning Maryland's only competitive seat into a safe Democratic one. As someone from Cordova, where we already struggle to be heard in Annapolis, this would further marginalize our conservative-leaning, rural perspective, making it harder to address local challenges like rising sea levels or economic pressures on family farms.

Moreover, this mid-cycle redistricting sets a dangerous precedent. Our Constitution and established practices tie redistricting to the decennial census for a reason—to ensure stability and prevent endless political manipulation. By authorizing the General Assembly to alter districts now and granting the Supreme Court original jurisdiction for review, HB0488 opens the door to frequent map changes whenever one party holds power, leading to instability and voter cynicism. We've seen this play out in other states, where constant redrawing leads to more polarization and less accountability. Why rush this change when the 2030 census is just around the corner? It feels like a power grab, especially coming on the heels of Governor Moore's Redistricting Advisory Commission's recommendations, which prioritize national party goals over Maryland's diverse regions.

Finally, this bill ignores the real needs of Marylanders. Instead of focusing on divisive map changes that could cost taxpayers in legal battles and administrative expenses, we should invest in priorities like education, infrastructure on the Shore, and healthcare access in rural areas. HB0488 doesn't solve any problems—it creates them by fracturing communities of interest and weakening representation for places like Talbot County.

I urge the Committee to reject HB0488 and maintain our current districts until the next census. Let's keep politics out of map-drawing and focus on what unites us as Marylanders. Thank you for your time, and I am available for questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'Nicole Ewing', with a stylized, flowing script.

Nicole Ewing