

Testimony in Opposition to HB0488 Election Districts - General Assembly and Representatives in Congress | R. James Vaughn

Good afternoon, Chair Healey, Vice Chair Holmes, members of the committee, and fellow Marylanders. My name is R. James Vaughn, and I am a resident of Ridgely in Maryland's First Congressional District. I am here today as a concerned citizen to respectfully voice my strong opposition to HB0488 and the proposed redistricting of the First District, which at face value appears to further entrench partisan gerrymandering at the expense of fair representation.

Maryland's voter registration data paints a clear picture of a politically diverse state. Out of approximately 4.3 million registered voters, Democrats make up just over half, while nearly one-quarter are Republicans and nearly one-quarter are unaffiliated. These numbers matter. Yet under the map recommended by the Governor's Redistricting Advisory Commission, Maryland risks sending zero Republicans to Congress. That outcome would effectively silence a substantial segment of the electorate and distort the will of the people rather than reflect it.

We have seen this pattern before. Following the 2010 census, partisan redistricting reshaped the Sixth District in a way that isolated Western Maryland communities and stripped them of meaningful representation. Now, similar tactics threaten the First District. The Eastern Shore is a distinct region with shared economic, cultural, and geographic interests. Fragmenting these communities to achieve partisan outcomes prioritizes political advantage over representative government and results in districts that are neither compact nor respectful of natural or political boundaries.

This approach directly contradicts the Maryland Declaration of Rights. Article 7 affirms that the people's right to participate in the legislature is the foundation of all free government, and that elections ought to be free and meaningful. When district lines are drawn to predetermine outcomes, that right is diminished. Article 1 further declares that all government originates from the people and is instituted for the good of the whole, not for the benefit of a single party or political interest.

Even Article III, Section 4 of the Maryland Constitution provides clear principles for redistricting: compactness, adjacency, and respect for political subdivisions. Those principles should guide congressional maps as well. HB0488 and the proposed map fall short of that standard.

I urge this committee, in the interest of preserving Maryland's democratic integrity, to reject HB0488 and pursue a fair, transparent, and nonpartisan redistricting process that honors all Maryland voters. Thank you for your time and consideration.