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**Committee:** Education, Energy, and the Environment  
**Testimony on:** SB 29 Special Elections – Procedures and General Assembly Vacancies and Ties  
**Position:** Favorable  
**Hearing Date:** January 30, 2024

The Maryland Chapter of the Sierra Club urges a favorable report on SB 29. The bill is a proposed constitutional amendment that provides for election of a General Assembly member to fill a vacancy or resolve a tie, unless the vacancy happens to occur during the last year of the 4-year term of office.

The Sierra Club and its members advocate on behalf of both the natural and human environments, including ending racial and social injustice. As a grassroots organization, we seek to foster strong relationships between voters and their representatives in government.

We recognize that some of Maryland’s truly outstanding legislators first began their service after being appointed through the existing process, and the State continues to benefit greatly from their presence and service. However, we support this change in process because we believe that, in general, election rather than appointment will result in closer connections between new legislators and their constituents.

Special elections are widely used to fill vacancies in legislative offices, including any vacancy in the U.S. House of Representatives. Special elections are used to fill vacancies in state legislatures by 25 of the 38 states with 4-year terms, including Pennsylvania, Delaware, and Virginia.<sup>1</sup> In recent years Maryland has had special elections to fill Congressional vacancies (2008 and 2020), and to fill vacancies in county council seats in Montgomery County (2008 and 2009) and Prince George’s County (2022).

Legislators in the General Assembly make decisions that have broader influence on the lives of Marylanders than county council members do, and we believe it is important for voters whose lives will be affected to elect the representatives who will make those decisions. Filling vacancies by special election will increase connections between voters and new legislators, and should promote additional confidence in our representative system of government.

For those reasons, we urge a favorable report on SB 29.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ncsl.org/elections-and-campaigns/filling-legislative-vacancies>,  
<https://www.ncsl.org/resources/details/number-of-legislators-and-length-of-terms-in-years>