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Committee: Ways and Means
Testimony on: HB 417 General Assembly – Special Election to Fill a Vacancy in Office
Position: Favorable
Hearing Date: February 14, 2023

The Maryland Chapter of the Sierra Club urges a favorable report on SB 417. The bill is a proposed constitutional amendment that provides for election of a General Assembly member to fill a vacancy that occurs early in the 4-year term of office.

The Sierra Club and its members care about 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 in turn has benefited greatly. We support this change in process, however, because we believe that, in general, election rather than appointment will result in closer connections between new legislators and their constituents.

This bill requires a special election to fill a vacancy in the General Assembly only when the vacancy occurs early enough that the special election can be combined with the next regular statewide election. The cost of adding one additional race to the ballots already being prepared for the election will be negligible.

Filling vacancies that occur early in a 4-year term by special election will increase connections between voters and new legislators, and should promote confidence in our democratic system of government. For these reasons, we urge a favorable report on HB 417.

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