



TESTIMONY TO THE SENATE EDUCATION, ENERGY, AND THE ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

SB 29 Special Elections - Procedures and General Assembly Vacancies and Ties

Position: Support

By: Linda T. Kohn, President

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The League of Women Voters of Maryland supports Senate Bill 29, requiring that a special election be held when there is a vacancy or tie for office within 45 days if they should occur outside of a General Assembly election year.

Since 1985, the League of Women Voters of Maryland has supported the use of special elections to fill vacancies in the office of Senator or Delegate. We strongly believe that legislative representatives should be selected by their constituents rather than potentially serve nearly a full four-year term based on appointment by the Governor. LWVMD is pleased that SB 29 would establish a uniform requirement for special elections across all state jurisdictions.

Most of the prior Special Election bills called for tie-in special elections to be held in conjunction with other regularly scheduled elections. SB 29 proposes a different approach that would result in a more expeditious way to engage voters in selecting a replacement than waiting for the next regularly scheduled statewide election. It proposes sending a mail-in ballot to each qualified voter who lives in the legislative where the vacancy has occurred. In addition, to accommodate those who prefer to vote in person, it proposes having at least one vote center open six days before the special election and on the day of the election. The bill describes appropriate requirements for locating these vote centers that ensures accessibility by the voters.

Currently, Maryland's Senate is comprised of 47 members with one-third of those being appointed and Maryland's House of 141 members with 20% appointed. LWVMD is concerned by these statistics as well as how high Maryland ranks in vacancies.

The League also supports additional actions to improve the transparency of filling legislative vacancies, including statewide standards regulating the central committee nominating process, public notice of meetings within the vacated district for constituent input, the public announcement of candidates prior to that meeting, and a publicly recorded vote of each committee member.

The LWVMD strongly urges a favorable report on SB 29.

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