

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE MARYLAND HOUSE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE
TUESDAY, February 24, 2021 AT 1 PM
HOUSE BILL 447 Circuit Court Elections

Presented by Claudia Barber, 2016 and 2018 candidate for judge on Circuit Court for Anne Arundel County.

Good afternoon Mr. Chairman and members of the House Judiciary Committee.

How many members of this Judiciary Committee know why there are no Hispanics, no Native Americans and no Asian Americans on most of the circuit courts in Maryland? Why hasn't a task force been established to determine why these ethnic groups are consistently shut out of the short listing process, especially in counties such as Anne Arundel County, which has a history of blocking and/or not considering non-White applicants for nomination to the circuit court judiciary from 2005-2017.

House Bill 447, and its companion bill, do not help us get closer to eliminating this exclusionary practice or otherwise known as state sponsored discrimination.

Just as the Maryland Legislative Black Caucus met this month with the Maryland State Superintendent of Police about discrimination in the State police force, it is time for the same Caucus or other legislators to summons the Judicial Nominating Commission members and get answers regarding why the Commission practices disparate selections that consistently benefit White males, who often are less qualified than applicants of color. The Commission needs to be taken to task and be required to disclose exactly what criteria are they using to short list candidates for judiciary nominations. Show the notes. Show how interviews are the same or not the same.

The Commission's current selection process is not transparent and there is no real oversight of Judicial Nominating Commission members. Therefore, we ask members of the House Judiciary Committee to vote **NO** on House Bill 447, which would change what is supposed to be a transparent and open nominating process to one that will only encourage further discriminatory practices.

Further and of great significance, the elimination of Circuit Court judges contested judicial elections to be replaced by retention judicial elections only is a sophisticated voter suppression tactic. Vote **NO** to House Bill 447 because it deprives voters of their constitutional right to choose trial court judges that they will have to live with for the next fifteen (15) years. Vote **NO** to voter suppression and biased judicial nomination selection practices!

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Thank you, House Judiciary Committee members and Mr. Chairman for your time.