



MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND
WOMEN'S DEMOCRATIC CLUB

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**Senate Bill SB0029 - Special Elections – Procedures and General Assembly Vacancies and Ties
Senate Finance Committee – January 30, 2024
FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENT**

Thank you for this opportunity to submit written testimony concerning an important priority of the **Montgomery County Women's Democratic Club (WDC)** for the 2024 legislative session. WDC is one of the largest and most active Democratic clubs in our state with hundreds of politically active members, including many elected officials.

WDC urges the passage of SB0029 with an amendment to require special elections to fill all General Assembly vacancies and ties. WDC members live in a county in which 41% of its legislators were appointed by vote of the Democratic Central Committee. We live in a state in which 24% of the General Assembly members were appointed to their seats. This practice is undemocratic and unacceptable.

WDC opposes all appointments to fill legislative vacancies, because even in the last year of a legislator's term, an appointment confers on the appointee unfair advantages in stature, communications, and fundraising that no challenger will possess. In Montgomery County, that advantage is conferred by the vote of 14 individuals, only two of whom are guaranteed to reside in the district. Additionally, those appointed early in the term are making decisions for their constituents for the remaining 4 years without being voted into office by their constituents. The advantages of incumbency should only be conferred by district voters whose votes have created a legitimate incumbent.

Cost and "inconvenience" do not justify removing the franchise from voters. With the widespread use of mail-in voting, special elections can be held far more easily and with less cost than might have been the case even a few years ago. In addition, if the vacancy occurs in the final year of the sitting member's term, the vacancy can be filled either at the time of the next primary election or the general election. With multi-representative districts, a relatively short vacancy will not deprive district voters of representation. Twenty-five states respect that open and fair elections are the bedrock of democracy and fill their legislative vacancies with special elections.¹ It is time for Maryland to join them.

We ask for your support for SB0029 and strongly urge a favorable Committee report with the amendment noted above.

Tazeen Ahmad
WDC President

Beth Tomasello
Co-Chair, WDC Advancing
Democracy in Maryland
Subcommittee

Cynthia Rubenstein
Co-Chair, Advocacy

¹ <https://www.ncsl.org/elections-and-campaigns/filling-legislative-vacancies>.