



HCCA

Howard County Citizens Association

Since 1961... The Voice of the People of Howard County

December 16, 2022

Testimony Supporting 7-23

It is commendable to include the Columbia Association and Village Board elections in requiring disclosure of contributions to campaigns. We need transparency therein due to the power and ability to affect a large amount of land use decisions, and budgets. Maybe add in-kind expenditures also.

Testimony opposing 10-23

We deeply oppose having ANY Board of Education member positions be appointed. The reasons publicized so far, for this proposed change do not warrant disenfranchising Howard County voters. This proposed change will worsen collaboration, increase politics within the Board, and not necessarily meet any stated goals for the change.

The State giving money to our school system, and wanting more accountability and control of the Board of Education is no reason to thwart voters. Whether it be turnout, or degree of fiscal expertise, there is no difference regarding these concerns in State and other offices. Our elected officials often seek expert opinions to assist in their work, for instance, when their personal expertise lies in other fields like medical, insurance, legal, etc. Blueprint has its own safeguards for implementation.

We should keep our current long-fought for system, to enable diversity and accountability. The reason the change was made creating our current system was the deep desire to increase accountability with smaller jurisdictions after the debacle of the Foose years. Arguments made at the time, against the change, included the fact that voters got it right, so why change things? But, the counter was that needing change should not reach the level of such dire inappropriateness to get voters more informed. We needed easier constituent responsibility. That notion eventually carried the day and the change was made, with much thanks to Delegate Atterbeary. The community will feel appointed members would be more beholden to those appointing than the voters.

Amendments to this Bill cannot improve the process. The process should remain the same. Concerns about voter turnout, that exist in every race, can be addressed with projects to get out the vote, and apply the Citizens Election Fund. Concerns about fiscal expertise can be addressed with training, maybe increased pay, and are already addressed, again, as in every other position, with assistance. Too many fringe candidates being elected and possibly trampling on rights is a rumored fear, yet, currently there is not a voting block of concern. Adding more Members would lessen possible fringe influences but brings some fiscal and procedural problems, if addressed may help but still all should be elected. Some are suggesting we add Council seats. That makes sense, given we have added none since the inception of the Council over 50 years ago, but that isn't going to help the Board of Education election process anytime soon.

The best thing to do, at this time, is to withdraw this Bill, and discuss County election concerns specifically and clearly with direct proposed solutions, not assumptions that appointed choices would do so much better than voters' choices.