



## MARYLAND HOUSE REPUBLICAN CAUCUS

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### Minority Leader

Delegate Nicholas R. Kipke, District 31

### Minority Whip

Delegate Kathy Szeliga, District 7

March 27, 2018

The Honorable Anne Healey, Chair  
Rules and Executive Nominations Committee  
6 Bladen Street, Suite 150  
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Madame Chair,

We write today to implore you to restore the public's confidence in the integrity of the Maryland General Assembly and allow a vote on legislation that will eliminate partisan gerrymandering. It is time to restore citizen's faith in the fairness of their congressional and legislative districts.

House Bill 356 - General Assembly and Congressional Legislative Redistricting Apportionment Commission received a hearing over a month ago, yet it has not been brought to a vote by the House Rules Committee. The Governor's legislation addresses both congressional and legislative districts, giving Marylanders the opportunity to vote on a referendum in the next election. House Bill 356 will make Maryland a leader in redistricting reform and develop a new process, independent from political influence.

Our current inequitable process is the subject of an ongoing lawsuit, *Bensiek v. Lamone*, which will be heard before the Supreme Court tomorrow. As noted by the Baltimore Sun, "The Supreme Court has an opportunity in this case to uphold the Constitution's promise that the House (and by implication, state legislative) bodies reflect the changing will of the people, not the interests of incumbents or whatever party is in power when the lines are drawn."

How much longer do we have to wait for a reform that over 78% of Marylanders want? How much longer will we have the dubious distinction of being home to the most gerrymandered districts in the nation?

Marylanders deserve better. The time for delay is over. The time for free and fair elections is **now**. Maryland citizens have reached a consensus that transcends other political differences - redistricting reform is desperately needed and has been overdue for decades. Recent election cycles have resulted in numerous lawsuits. Maps were invalidated in 1994 for failing to create a majority-minority district as required by the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Again, in 2002, maps were

overturned for repeated crossings of lines between Baltimore City and Baltimore County that improperly prioritized political goals over constitutional congruence standards.

The current process is nothing less than a form of political subterfuge, which could not be more evident by comments from former Governor Martin O'Malley, who said: *"As a governor, I held that redistricting pen in my own Democratic hand. I was convinced that we should use our political power to pass a map that was more favorable for the election of Democratic candidates."*

The eyes of the nation are on us, and failure to move this bill puts this body on the wrong side of history. While we respect the committee system in the General Assembly, we also know the system can often be a tool to simply stall the passage of meaningful legislation. There is no time to stall on this issue. If there is not immediate action, we will petition the legislation from the possession of the House Rules Committee.

The passage of this legislation will show our citizens that their elected leaders were able to come together in a bipartisan manner and put politics aside to restore fair elections to Maryland.

We appreciate your timely attention to this urgent matter.

Sincerely,



Nic Kipke  
Minority Leader



Kathy Szeliga  
Minority Whip

cc: The Honorable Michael E. Busch, Speaker of the House