

*March 29, 2013*

***TO: THE PEOPLE OF LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT 8***

**LEGISLATION TO CHANGE THE REFERENDUM PROCESS – VOTER SUPPRESSION**

**I have supported many efforts to expand access to voting and increase opportunities for people to vote. Voting is the foundation of a representative government, and I regard anything that makes it more difficult for people to vote as voter suppression.**

**Legislation introduced this session, under the guise of “referendum reform,” is anything but reform. I see it as legislation to suppress voting. Specifically, the proposal makes it more difficult to petition a bill approved by the General Assembly to referendum. Under current law, a group or persons attempting to get a bill before the voters on referendum must secure signatures from 3% of Maryland’s registered voters who casted votes for governor in the last election. Today, that number would amount to about 56,000 signatures.**

**The proposal – SB 706 – would change the state constitution to require the signatures of 5% of Maryland’s registered voters in order to get a bill on referendum. Today, that number would amount to about 188,000. It should be emphasized that if this bill passes, one would need three times the amount of signatures now required in order to successfully petition a bill to referendum.**

**Introduction of the legislation was prompted by the successful petition drive to get three bills on referendum in the 2012 election, in hopes that voters would reject the bills. The measures, which were controversial, included bills to allow same-sex marriage, enable undocumented immigrants to pay the less expensive in-state tuition rate to attend state colleges or universities, and the newly drawn congressional districts. The voters approved all three measures.**

**This was the first time in 20 years that any bill had been successfully petitioned to referendum. Those who conducted the petition drive used Internet technology to aid in collecting the necessary signatures. Supporters of legislation to change the referendum process were displeased that voters petitioned several bills to referendum. Many of those supporters wish to make the process more difficult, which passage of their bill will certainly do.**

**I am proud that Maryland is 1 of 27 states that has a referendum process. We must not allow legislation to restrict citizen’s rights to petition any bill to referendum. This bill is nothing more than a blatant attempt at voter suppression, and as such should be killed.**

**Please do not hesitate to contact me on this or any other legislative issue of concern to you. I encourage and welcome your input.**