



House Bill 129

Staggered Election Terms - Charter County Councils

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**
WITH AMENDMENTS

To: Ways and Means Committee

Date: February 10, 2016

From: Michael Sanderson

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS** HB 129 **WITH AMENDMENTS**. The bill would amend the Maryland Constitution to allow charter counties to adopt “staggered term” elections for their Council representatives. MACo urges an amendment to expand the provisions to apply to any county seeking such an option.

Currently, the Maryland Constitution dictates that county elections be held on the same four-year cycle as the state’s gubernatorial elections. The two exceptions are a long-standing different cycle for Baltimore City, and a relatively recent move to staggered terms in Cecil County. The Cecil County adoption included a full approval by both the citizens of Cecil County and the entire State of Maryland – where citizens approved of the proposed change by similar strong margins.

The terms and timing of local elections are a matter reasonably left to those governed. HB 129 creates a local option for charter counties to adopt a staggered term, with elections split between the gubernatorial and presidential elections. MACo would suggest that this reasonable local flexibility should be extended to all county governments, regardless of their local structure of governance. MACo would agree with language specifying that a local voter approval process in non-charter counties be a requisite part of any such change (comparable to a charter amendment).

Staggered terms may present greater and more frequent citizen accountability for county elected officials, and may reduce the dramatic loss of institutional knowledge that sometimes accompanies across-the-board electoral change. County elected officials routinely experience 50% turnover in the gubernatorial cycle, leaving some governing bodies without any experienced members. HB 129 does not require or even endorse the change to staggered terms, it merely creates the local option for the citizens.

For these reasons, MACo requests a **FAVORABLE** report on HB 129, **WITH AMENDMENTS** to extend its application statewide.