

**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
**Washington, DC 20515-2003**  
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September 29, 2015

State Board of Elections  
151 West Street, Suite 200  
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Chairman McManus and Board Members:

I am writing to express my concerns about the recent vote by the Montgomery County Board of Elections to close the Marilyn J. Praisner Community Recreation Center as an early voting center for the 2016 election cycle.

In 2008, Maryland voters overwhelmingly approved a constitutional amendment to establish early voting in our state. The adoption of early voting has been a great success, giving Maryland voters an enhanced opportunity to exercise their right to vote. The closing of the Praisner Center as an early voting center would negatively impact thousands of Maryland voters, including scores of minority voters.

In proposing the change, County Board of Elections Chairman Shalleck argued it would expand the geographic reach of early voting and noted the recent growth of nearby communities. Whatever the rationale offered, it cannot justify eliminating a site that has dramatically increased the voting opportunity for so many Maryland voters. The area surrounding the Praisner Center has had one of the largest population growths in Montgomery County as shown by the 2010 Census.<sup>i</sup> Furthermore within a short period, this same area has become one of the largest majority-minority communities in the county.

In the review of its performance as an early voting site, Praisner was second to only the Silver Spring Civic Center in the 2014 primary and general elections. This accounted for more than 14 percent of the county's total votes. Although the addition of four more early voting sites in 2014 led to decreasing numbers in most of the original five early voting centers, Praisner continued to see a rise in voter numbers.<sup>ii</sup> It is clear voters in this area are increasingly and consistently exercising their right to vote and maximizing the availability of an early voting site in their community.

Research done by the Maryland Board of Elections in 2012 shows that the distance a voter must travel to an early voting site has a direct correlation with the likelihood they will

vote.<sup>iii</sup> With the removal of the Praisner Center, voters in East County would be forced to use the Silver Spring Civic Center or the Wheaton Fire and Rescue Squad to vote. Both of these early voting sites are more than a 20 minute drive and can take more than an hour to reach using public transportation. The Maryland Board of Elections estimates that such travel times would reduce the likelihood of voting to below 10 percent.<sup>iv</sup>

Removal of the Marilyn J. Praisner Community Recreation Center as an early voting site is at odds with the County Board's responsibility to make early voting available to fast growing and diverse communities. The people within these communities have demonstrated that they want to exercise their right to vote and take advantage of the early voting opportunities. For these reasons, I urge the Maryland Board of Elections to reject the proposed change.

Sincerely,



John P. Sarbanes

Member of Congress

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<sup>iii</sup>"Montgomery County QuickFacts from the US Census Bureau." Montgomery County QuickFacts from the US Census Bureau. US Census Bureau, 31 Aug. 2015. Web. 25 Sept. 2015.

<sup>iv</sup>Early Voting Turnout in Montgomery County by Location, 2010-2014. 2014. Raw data. Montgomery County MD Government, Rockville, MD.

<sup>v</sup>Willis, John T., Bob Murphy, and Ann Cotten. *Voting and the Administration of Elections in Maryland*. Rep. Schaefer Center for Public Policy, 15 Jan. 2014. Web. 25 Sept. 2015.

<sup>vi</sup>*Ibid.*