

For Montgomery County, Term Limits are in the best interest of the voting public

The reason to support term limits for Montgomery County elected officials is not to punish current office holders or to empower groups or parties that are not currently elected, it is to provide an environment where the local government can be more flexible and responsive to voters and the general public.

From the materials I read I tried to distill the main reasons to support term limits on county elected officials. Below are six reasons why I support term limits:

1. **Governance by the people** - The Citizen Legislature is a core ingredient of the democratic process. Without reasonable limits on the time one person can hold an office, they become professional politicians, entrenched in the structure and surrounded by a cadre of staff and outside supporters who look to perpetuate the status quo rather than reflecting the needs of a changing community.
2. **Meaningful elections** - Elections become less meaningful when a long term incumbent runs. The vast majority of elections are won by incumbents, who have name recognition, political organizations, donors and outside group support already in place. Currently, capable candidates often will not enter a race against an incumbent because the odds of winning are very low. Therefore competition and choice for voters is limited, making elections meaningless to many voters because no real change in issues or priorities take place.
3. **Influence of special interests** - Longevity in office promotes selective vision of what's important. Working for a long time with special interest groups allows these groups (unions, business groups, real estate interest, community organizations etc.) to exercise undue influence in public policy. This can be an insidious relationship that shapes public policy and public funding toward those favored to the exclusion of other needs and new initiatives. Office holders would not need the support of special interest groups if they know they are leaving office after three terms. This freedom could allow incumbents to be more open to new priorities, programs and

policy ideas. New office holders can bring a fresh set of eyes to problems without a prior history with participants.

4. **Diversity** - Term limits increase the possibility of electing a diverse set of candidates that reflect the county's population. Montgomery County is much more diverse than the legislative and executive office holders reflect. This is true for their political party, ethnicity, ideological preferences and geographic location. Turnover in office, particularly after over a decade in office, makes it more likely that the new official will be more representative of the current population.
5. **Expertise not lost** - Expertise in local problems and issues acquired in office is not lost. As experienced legislators or county executives rotate out of office, they are available to advise and consult both government and other organizations on developing solutions to complex local problems. The new office holder can call upon them in many ways to assist the county if needed. Many local and State boards, commissions and task forces are even now populated with former elected officials. While the former official cannot dictate policy they can have influence in complex areas by providing valuable advice. In addition, a term-limited local official might run for another office at the local or state level using the knowledge of local issues as a strong foundation.
6. **Term Limits not new** - Limiting terms of elected office holders is not a new concept. The Country passed a constitutional amendment limiting the President to two terms. Nationwide many state and local political bodies have term limits, including the State of California and 14 other state legislatures. Governors have term limits in 36 of the 50 states.

Term limits are not new to Maryland. The Governor is limited by the state constitution to two terms. Maryland counties of Anne Arundel, Howard and Prince George's have term limits in their charters for their councils and executives. In addition, Harford County and Baltimore County have term limits for their executives. These jurisdictions are of similar size and complexity to Montgomery County and appear to function well with term limits.

While literature and research has recorded that term limits have changed the way legislatures operate, they still do work. Budgets get passed, laws are enacted, and the process of government continues. Polls show that the voters in term-limited states still support limiting terms, and that is probably the best argument for Montgomery County to adopt the practice.

I don't claim that my list of six reasons is the do all and end all of the reasons to support term limits. While these are only my thoughts on the issue, I hope our fellow Commissioners find them relevant. I look forward to any comments, additions or questions that people have.

Best regards-

Larry Lauer

A. L. Lauer
Member CRC
Olney, MD