



Written by [James Murphy](#) on October 23, 2021

## Almost Heaven, West Virginia? Three Maryland Counties Request to Join West Virginia

Feeling abandoned and neglected by their own state government, the three mountainous counties that comprise Maryland's panhandle have requested to join the neighboring state of West Virginia. West Virginia Governor Jim Justice has announced that he would be all for the counties to join his state.

A group of six lawmakers representing Garrett, Allegany, and Washington counties at the extreme west of the state wrote to the West Virginia legislature, asking them to consider the move. The three counties have a combined population of just over 250,000.



"We believe this arrangement may be mutually beneficial for both states and for our local constituencies," wrote the Republican lawmakers. "Please advise on next steps."

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While acknowledging the long odds of the political maneuver, one of signers of the letter, Wendell Beitzel, a Republican who represents parts of Garrett and Allegany Counties, claimed that the request was a serious one — not simply a political stunt.

"We wouldn't be doing this if we didn't feel there is a strong sense of unrest and unhappiness among people in our rural area of the state," Beitzel said.

In a [press conference](#), West Virginia Governor Jim Justice, a Republican, enthusiastically opened the door for the three Maryland counties to defect to the Mountain State

"We want everyone to always know that we're absolutely standing here with open arms, we'd welcome ... these counties and be tickled to death to have them and the great folks of that incredible state," Justice said.

"For Garrett County ... for Allegany County and for Washington County, we would welcome you in every way," Justice concluded.

The proposal stems from a feeling in the three counties that the values of the more populous eastern portion of the state take precedence in Maryland's state government, with Garrett, Allegany and Washington Counties' wishes being largely ignored in the legislature. Among key issues that have angered Western Maryland are the state's hard line against fracking, and its support for mask mandates and the teaching of critical race theory in public schools.

"The people out here keep contacting the legislators from this region and saying: 'Why don't we go to West Virginia? Why don't we go to West Virginia?'" Beitzel said. "All the legislators have been hounded



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from our constituents to check in on the possibility.”

“We’re kind of ignored up here, and that’s why people are thinking West Virginia might be an option if they keep ignoring us,” Michael Swauger, the owner of a barber shop in Grantsville, in Garrett County, told the *New York Times*.

Some believe that the letter is little more than a tactic to get legislators in Annapolis to take the concerns of Western Maryland more seriously. Eric Luedtke, a Democrat and the majority leader in the Maryland House of Delegates, called it “an unnecessarily divisive political stunt.”

Although nearly everyone in the Maryland legislature has dismissed the notion of allowing the conservative western counties to just leave, there are reasons that it could be beneficial from a left-wing point of view. For instance, Maryland currently has a Republican governor — Larry Hogan. Cutting those three conservative counties loose could give Democrats a safe governorship for the foreseeable future. It could also make the Democrats’ hold onto the state’s Senate seats more strongly than it already is.

However, the population loss and the prospect of Maryland possibly losing one of its eight members in the U.S. House of Representatives will likely make the request of the three counties a moot point.

It’s not the first time the three western Maryland counties have broached the subject. In 2013, the same three counties expressed a desire to leave Maryland but that effort was crushed in its infancy.

Currently, however, such movements are gaining momentum as state governments feel ever more emboldened to take draconian measures against citizens’ liberties. In the Northwest, the [Greater Idaho](#) movement beckons counties from left-wing states such as California, Washington, and Oregon to join Idaho, which values individual liberty more. Residents of Northern California and Southern Oregon have also launched the idea of creating a new fifty-first state called [Jefferson](#).

In [New Hampshire](#), some in the state have become so fed up with dictates from the federal government, that they have introduced legislation that would ask voters to consider whether the state should secede from the United States altogether.

People want to live in places where their political and cultural values are respected. The people of Western Maryland, Northern California, Eastern Oregon, and Eastern Washington don’t feel aligned with their state governments in any way. Why not attempt to move to a state that’s more in line with their values?



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