



**House Bill 655 (Delegate Crosby)
Local Government – County Commissioner Elections – District Voting
FAVORABLE**

March 23, 2021

Dear Chair Pinsky and Esteemed Members of the Committee:

On behalf of Strong Future Maryland we write in support of House Bill 655. Strong Future Maryland works to advance bold, progressive policy changes to address systemic inequality and promote a sustainable, just, and prosperous economic future for all Marylanders. We urge you to support this legislation to provide voting rights protections and fair representation of minority voters.

This legislation is necessary for providing fair representation across our state. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 bans voter discrimination, however, voter disenfranchisement is still happening in five counties in our state. These counties conduct county elections as at-large elections despite the county commissioners being elected to represent a specific district. This is both contrary to the intent and purpose of district representation and is out of line with what a majority of counties in the state do. Voting at-large and not allowing for true district representation does not provide for equal representation.

As an example, St. Mary's County elects its four district commissioners at-large. This completely dilutes the voting power of non-white voters in Lexington Park and Great Mills, resulting in the disenfranchisement of African-American residents and inadequate representation of the people in these communities. HB655 would require that any district official be elected by a plurality of the voters who live within that district, rather than allowing a district to be represented by someone who receives a plurality of votes at-large but not within the district.

We urge you to give HB655 a favorable report to support fair representation across the entire state of Maryland.

*John B. King Jr.
Founder and Board Chair*

*Alice Wilkerson
Executive Director*

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