

March 23, 2021

Testimony on HB 655
Local Elections- County Commissioner and County Board of Education- District Voting
Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

Position: Favorable

Common Cause Maryland supports HB 655, which would require that candidates running for the position of county commissioner in Calvert, Charles, Garrett, Queen Anne’s or St. Mary’s county would need to be elected only by voters within that particular district. This amendment to current voting laws in these counties, would ensure that commissioners are elected solely by district members and not the entire county. District members should have the ability to vote for their representatives without fear of outside influence or the lack of interest shown by commissioners.

In a recent article, Maryland Matters quoted Yuriy Rudensky who is the redistricting counsel in the Brennan Center for Justice’s Democracy Program on his views on the impact of the bill. He stated that the use of at-large systems “was a response to the end of slavery and the 15th Amendment and the expansion of the right to vote to Black folks. It was one of the tools that was used to ensure that areas that had significant Black populations — but that weren’t majority-Black — couldn’t fully exercise their vote.”

To add, certain counties such as St. Mary’s County where there is a large discrepancy in racial demographics would benefit from the passing of this bill. The county is currently 78.1% white, 15.2% Black and 4.5% Hispanic. Assuming that the majority of each racial demographic votes in a typical county commissioner election, the population that is predominantly white would have more influence on deciding on a commissioner. With this mind, certain districts that are predominantly one race would not benefit from this combination. The citizens of these counties deserve to have fair and just representation by those who care for their needs.

Common Cause Maryland strongly supports the effort to move towards a fairer voting system in which the opinions of citizens are prioritized and proper representation is given. We support HB 655 and encourage a favorable vote.

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Common Cause Maryland