

Madam Chair, Mr. Vice Chair, and members of the House Ways and Means Committee,

My name is Julie Randall and I live in Lexington Park, Maryland in St. Mary's County. I am here to ask for your support of HB 0655. This bill would change Commissioner Elected Counties that currently use the 'At Large' category of voting to a 'District' elected designation. I strongly believe that sufficient and proper representation exists when it is closest to the people. When a Commissioner is elected by his/her district and not at large, he/she can and will give the individuals in his/her district the support and attention they need and deserve of their elected County Commissioner.

The At Large voting system for all districts in a County silences the individual voices of the voters in certain districts and replaces their voices with those of the majority party in counties that are dominated by one political party or another. This is undemocratic, as it leaves many people without representation in their local governments. When Commissioners are elected At Large, by the entire County, they neglect to fully represent their constituents in their District. Their voices get lost in the 'whole county' approach.

For example, District 4 in St. Mary's County is predominantly populated with people of color whose incomes are at the bottom of the scale in the County. These individuals' needs are most certainly different than the needs of citizens in other more affluent districts of our County. For almost 20 years, District 4 citizens have been lobbying the County Commissioners for a much needed Community Center or YMCA. Their voices and needs have not been given serious attention and representation at the Commissioner table by the District 4 Commissioner during this time. The lack of a champion for this and many other infrastructure needs means the funding goes elsewhere and the disadvantaged citizens and children in District 4 get left behind.

The current system violates the spirit of the Voting Rights Act, Section 2. Citizens in District 4, the largest development district in St. Mary's County, need and deserve a full-time representative that understands their basic needs and works hard to meet them. Sadly, these citizens find themselves without a dedicated Commissioner representative and it shows in the projects that continue to be kicked down the road.

As a matter of basic democratic representation, there is something seriously wrong when the residents of the largest development district in St. Mary's County are prevented from electing their own Commissioner who would strongly and passionately represent their wishes and interests. The At Large voting system for County Commissioners is just not working.

To reiterate, HB 0655 would require the election of county commissioners to represent specific districts decided by a plurality of the votes cast within that

district. In a true democratic process, each of our 4 commissioner districts would vote for their own commissioner to represent them and their interests. The commissioner president would remain elected "at-large" by the entire county. The vast majority of Maryland Counties have seen the wisdom and fairness of this type of voting system. St. Mary's County desperately needs HB 0655 to be enacted.

I thank you for your time and ask for a favorable report.