

HB 0655: Favorable

- Current system disenfranchises non-white voters
- Commissioners are not accountable to the community they are elected to represent
- Commissioners should address the interests and needs of their district.

I live in Lexington Park in St. Mary's County, and I deserve to be represented by someone my community elected. But I am not. My County Commissioner doesn't need to be responsive to our needs because he can get elected without winning the majority of votes from his district. There are no consequences for the commissioner who works against the community he is supposed to represent. (I use He in this testimony because all of our Commissioners are white men.) When he chooses not to support the Community Center his district researched and lobbied for, he knows he can still get elected. He doesn't need his constituents' support. Most recently the Commissioners have backtracked on their plan to seat a diverse non-partisan redistricting board, delaying until mid-summer. Their concerns about the Redistricting Committee having enough time to complete their work vanished following local advocacy in support of this bill, HB 0655.

The majority of non-white voters, including African Americans like me, live in the Lexington Park/Great Mills area. When we nominate a non-white candidate or white ally for Commissioner our votes are diluted by the majority of white voters from other parts of the county and the result is a partisan BOCC lacking diversity. My district is the most racially diverse district in the county. My neighborhood reflects this diversity. It is also a welcoming community, not just toward racial and ethnic minorities, but also the LGBTQ community. Unfortunately our BOCC has not always been so accepting and that includes my commissioner.

I have written letters to my commissioner, given testimony in BOCC meetings and contributed letters to the editor asking that the BOCC to tone down their homophobic rhetoric and to respect everyone in our community. I have never received a response from my Commissioner beyond a form letter sent to everyone that does not address my concerns. The entire BOCC of St. Mary's County has demonstrated prejudice against the LGBTQ community through public statements and retaliatory actions against the County Library because of LGBTQ inclusive programming held at the Lexington Park Library. As a patron of the Lexington Park Library, and a librarian working in higher education, I have repeatedly tried to engage with my Commissioner on library issues. And yet, the only curb on the BOCC actions against the LGBTQ community has been failure at the state level ([HB 136 - MGA 2018](#)) and a potential lawsuits bolstered by the [MD Attorney General's office](#) questioning the legality of the BOCC retroactively charging the library \$2,439 for police protection after the Lexington Park Library hosted a Drag Queen Story Hour. The Lexington Park Library has provided not just traditional library services but social services including Lunch at the Library during summer and a year-long Little Free Pantry. And yet, my Commissioner wanted to punish the library for supporting LGBTQ youth and families.

Respectfully,

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