

Madam Chair, Mr. Vice Chair, and members of the House Ways and Means Committee, thank you for your time and attention to this important matter. My name is Paula Cox and I am the director of an After School Program in the Colony Square Community located in Lexington Park, MD.

I am here because I have the hearts and interests of the children and families I know and work with in mind. As you know, our system is built to work with and for the people. Public servants are voted into place and embody roles so they can speak and act on behalf of the people they serve. Unfortunately, this is not happening in our community.

The current system by which county commissioners are elected in St. Mary's County is silencing the voices and votes of people who should be allowed to speak. Often, that happens, but it must not be so.

Before opening the after-school program in 2018, I worked diligently with those in the community to empower their voices by walking alongside them to hear both the assets and needs of the community. From that listening, the After School Program was born. If I had not taken the time to know and hear from the families that lived in the community and been invited in to help be a solution in their community, I could have done great harm.

I see this happening with our Commissioners. They are quick to show up for a photo-op once a year during National Night Out, yet they fail to see Colony Square and other neighborhoods like it in Lexington Park as anything other than a problem to deal with. Seeing constituents as a problem to be managed rather than valuable resources that

are part of the growth and opportunity that is needed for a thriving community is the reason we need change.

Our community needs a commissioner who will seek to do what's best for its interests-- public servants who listen and want to make a difference as they serve and help. This person should be voted on by the people from their own district, and they should work hard to represent the people of their district, fighting for the rights and needs of all people, especially people who are not represented.