

**Testimony on SB 255 / HB350**

Voting Rights Act of 2026 — Counties and Municipal Corporations  
Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

**Position:** Favorable

**St. Mary's County Democratic Central Committee**—Chair, AnnMarie Abell

In St. Mary's County, ALL four of the District Commissioners and four District Board of Education members are elected by an AT-LARGE voting system instead of by just the voters in their district. This means the entire county votes for ALL the District Commissioners and Board of Education candidates regardless of which resident district they or the candidate resides. Everybody gets to vote for everybody.

St. Mary's County uses resident districts to ensure representation is geographically dispersed across the county. That's a good 20th century development, that falls short of what it means to have true democratic and inclusive representation. So, here we are, 25+ years into the 21st century, and St. Mary's County is STUCK with an AT-LARGE voting system that dilutes district voters' voices and choices. If district based voting is good enough for our Legislative and Congressional Districts, then it's good enough for our Commissioner AND Board of Education Districts.

Did you know that a Commissioner or Board of Education member can be elected from the district they reside in *without* having won the majority of their resident district voters? Yes, it's true. It's happened in St. Mary's during the 2014 and 2022 general elections.

In practice, this AT-LARGE voting system has the effect of candidates picking their voters. They can and do selectively campaign around the county. They use a pick-my-voters campaign strategy of getting the votes of residents in *other* districts to outvote other parts of the county. They win and their district loses because those votes have been diluted and their voices muted. The county as a whole can prevent other districts from having a seat at the table, denying them the representation they want and deserve.

So, elected officials can willfully ignore the voters in their district while governing, even voting against their district's interests, because after all, they really don't need their districts votes to win. That has happened too. When voters want to hold accountable "their" representative's actions and decisions, they can voice their displeasure by voting them out in the next election cycle, **except with AT-LARGE**, it's made mute by the rest of the county, making it harder to vote them out.

We have district-based voting for our State Legislative and Congressional districts for authentic accountability, which is so very much needed at the county level. SB 255 ensures district voters truly have a say in who represents them and their interests. Their voices need to be included and heard at the county's decision making table. If it's good enough for our Legislative and Congressional Districts, it's good enough for our Commissioner and Board of Education Districts.

Testimony submitted as FAVORABLE for SB 255.