



House Bill 655

Local Government - County Commissioner Elections - District Voting

MACo Position: **OPPOSE**

To: Education, Health, and Environmental
Affairs Committee

Date: March 18, 2021

From: Michael Sanderson

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **OPPOSES** HB 655. This bill would mandate the method by which county commissioners are elected to represent specified districts. Counties are concerned this one-size-fits-all approach would infringe on local autonomy and flexibility in local governance.

The method and structure of county elections are matters reasonably left to those governed. Currently, that authority is properly vested in county governing bodies, regardless of their local structure of governance. County commissioners are elected at-large, by district, or by a combination of these methods. This bill would usurp local authority by requiring the election of a commissioner to represent a specific district to be decided by a plurality of votes cast within that district. In American jurisprudence, the proper venue to remedy any defect in district-drawing or representative structures is the courts, rather than a superior political body.

MACo generally stands for the ability of county governments, guided by their locally elected officials, to serve and react to community needs. County governments – who meet regularly year-round and are deeply immersed in the community – are in the best position to manage these local affairs. Local decision-makers are elected to serve public needs, and their actions are subject to broad citizen and stakeholder input, and they are directly accountable to voters. This law would diminish local accountability, and local voter input.

HB 655 would infringe on local autonomy and decision-making by setting an unwarranted and troubling precedent that threatens to erode responsive and accountable governance. Accordingly, MACo requests an **UNFAVORABLE** report on HB 655.