

3/16/21

Committee Chair & Members,

I am writing to express my support for HB655. This bill would eliminate undemocratic voting practices currently in use throughout the state of Maryland by changing the law to require County Commissioners and Board of Education members to be elected by district. This is a much needed change which would bring these voting processes in line with how we already elected state and federal representatives.

In St. Mary's County we elect five County Commissioners. A few decades ago these commissioners were all voted on at-large and were not required to live in a particular district. This resulted in several commissioners being elected from the same area of the county, effectively leaving the rest of our community out of the process. A change was then made to require four of the five commissioners to live in the district where they are running, with the fifth remaining at-large. However, this decision was flawed too.

Even though candidates are restricted to running in their home district, the entire voting population of our county still votes on all five commissioner seats. This at-large voting procedure silences the votes of people in each district. If two candidates run in District 1, Candidate A may receive the majority of votes from voters in that district while Candidate B may receive a majority of votes from voters throughout the county. In the end, Candidate B would win the race despite having lost the support of the majority in their district.

Our current process devalues the votes of those in our county. This is why passing HB655 is so vital, not only for St. Mary's County but also for all other affected counties in the state. The people of each district deserve adequate representation from the candidate of their choice--not from the candidate chosen by voters outside the area. We would not, and do not, allow voters from another state to choose our representation in Maryland. Why do we allow this on a local level?

I encourage a favorable report from the EHE Committee, as well as your green vote once HB655 is on the Senate floor. It is imperative we send a message to Maryland voters that all votes are equal.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony.

Sincerely,

Brandon Russell  
he/him/his  
2nd Vice Chair, SMCDCC  
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