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**Committee:** Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs  
**Testimony on:** HB 655 – “Local Elections – County Commissioner and County Boards of Elections – District Voting”  
**Position:** Favorable  
**Hearing Date:** March 18, 2021

The Maryland Sierra Club urges a favorable report on HB655. This bill would improve democratic representation in certain Maryland counties which have county commissioners or board of education members who currently are elected at-large to represent a specific district. The bill would require that those commissioners and board of education members to be chosen by voters within their district instead of being chosen by all voters in their county.

The Sierra Club and its members care about both the natural and human environments, including ending racial and social injustice. Based on our review of the electoral circumstances in the counties affected by this legislation, we believe that specifying that district county commissioners and district school board members be elected by, and responsible to, the voters in their district will increase the diversity of viewpoints among those bodies as a whole, and increase the attention to local concerns and needs in each of these counties.

As a grassroots environmental advocacy group, the Sierra Club firmly believes that effective change often is exercised locally. We believe that a more representative democracy, achieved through direct representation, will result in greater stewardship of both the natural and human environments. A strong principle of democracy is that officials should be elected by the people they represent.

We urge a favorable report on HB655, as amended by the House of Delegates.

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Founded in 1892, the Sierra Club is America’s oldest and largest grassroots environmental organization. The Maryland Chapter has over 70,000 members and supporters, and the Sierra Club nationwide has approximately 800,000 members.