

**Chair Pinsky, Vice Chair Kagan, and members of the Senate
Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee:**

My name is Marcia Greenberg, and I live in Lexington Park in St. Mary's County. I am submitting testimony **in support of HB 655** to change from **countywide** to **district-specific** voting for County Commissioners.

I address this issue both as a resident voter who is personally affected by the current system, and as a lawyer who worked in Eastern Europe after the fall of the Berlin Wall to promote participation in democratic institutions and culture. While it is disappointing, though not surprising, to see partisanship drive the bill's opponents, it is basic principles of democratic participation and fairness that drive us, its supporters.

In America, we expect elected officials to be chosen by the voters they represent. In St Mary's, this applies to our federal and state representatives- but **not** to our local officials: Rather than being elected by voters in districts they represent, Commissioners are elected by voters countywide. **Note** that if that system were applied at the federal level, voters nationwide would be electing Maryland's senators!

Our current system is problematic because it **prevents** district residents from determining who represents them, **and it causes** Commissioners representing each district to **seek** votes countywide.

But there's another issue: **By creating competing incentives, the current system works against localized projects.** I offer an illustration:

For several years, residents in the southern part of St. Mary's County have advocated for a **Community Center to meet local needs** including: indoor spaces for youth activities; programming to support young peoples' educational and employment success; and community space to foster relationships among military, retirees and locals, and across racial and generational divisions. Local residents have fervently gathered petitions and data, built partnerships, and disseminated information.

But because of the Center's purposes, the **benefits would particularly serve local residents. This, unfortunately, generates a conflict:**

On the one hand, a Commissioner should be responsive to, and champion the interests of, his or her district's voters when they passionately advocate for a local project. But at the same time, his or her re-election requires justifying locally focused expenditures to voters countywide. **There should not be such a conflict. As a matter of principle and of democratic representation, it should be resolved in favor of unambiguous district representation. Commissioners should be elected by, and therefore fully accountable to, the residents of their districts.**

In closing, I **urge** this Committee to issue a **favorable report to the Senate on HB 655**. Thank you!