



THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

**Testimony for HB 655 – Local Elections - County Commissioner and County Boards of Education
- District Voting**

Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee

Good afternoon Chairman, Madam Vice Chair, and honorable members of the committee. My name is Brian Crosby and it's an honor to present HB655, entitled Local Elections - County Commissioner and County Boards of Education - District Voting.

This bill is about fairness, equality, and diversity. It improves democracy at the local level by instituting in-district voting, and ends a discriminatory and anti-democratic policy that has historically prevented minority political factions from engaging in the political process. Specifically, some counties in Maryland have historically operated under an at-large voting system for county commissioner and school board elections. Although candidates are required to reside in the district they represent, they are voted for by citizens outside of their district. You can see this system demonstrated in the graphic included at the end of my testimony: despite Yellow losing half of the districts by a 2-1 margin, the at-large voting system will result in four Yellow victories. This means that the 42% of voters who cast ballots for Green candidates will not have a single representative for their community's specific needs.

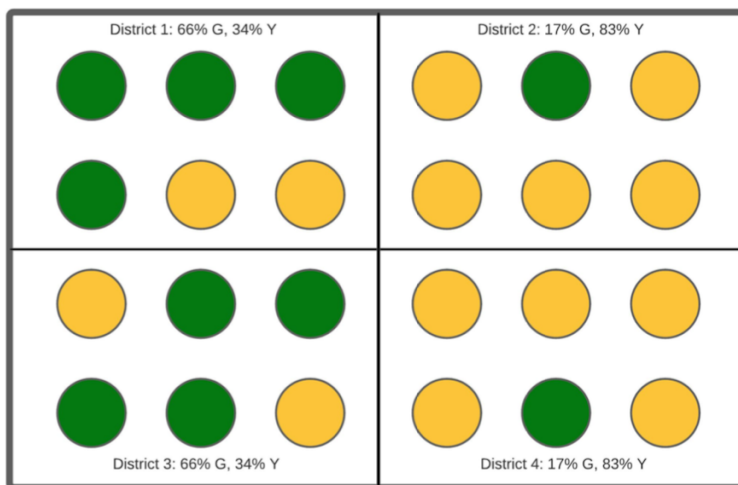
This electoral system directly conflicts with our idea of "representative government." The people of Pennsylvania don't pick our Senators in Washington, the people of Virginia don't pick our Governor, and people in Montgomery County don't pick who represents Calvert County or Howard County in this body. If I proposed a bill to change the General Assembly's electoral system to an at-large, districted system, I highly doubt the opponents of HB655 would support it. That system would benefit me and I wouldn't support it because it's simply not fair.

During the House Floor debate, Maj. Leader Leudtke gave a more contemporary, real-life example using Montgomery County's school board elections. Up until the 1980s, Montgomery County school board members were elected at-large. When a push to change this process was made in the mid-80s, the frustration was that too many officials were elected from the more populous, Democratic-leaning down-county. However, instead of implementing simple, in-district voting to include Republican voices, the county implemented school board districts that ensured geographic representation, but that were elected at-large. This achieved the goal of electing individuals from the more conservative, up-county areas; however, Democratic voters from down-county were able to

overpower the local preference of any single district, resulting in continued, down-county Democratic control of Montgomery County’s school boards.

This system originally proliferated during the Jim Crow era as a way to disenfranchise black voters in the South. Its sole purpose is to disadvantage and discourage racial or ideological minority groups, but we must keep in mind that criticisms of this system are not necessarily personal criticisms of the people who have fallen into them. This bill does not guarantee the success of any one political party, minority group, or person. It simply gives a district the fair opportunity to elect who best represents them. For these reasons, I ask for a favorable report, and I’m happy to take any questions at this time.

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Despite winning a majority of votes in two separate districts, the at-large voting system will result in 4 Y victories and 0 G victories, instead of a more representative 2 Y and 2 G.

HB 655

Vote Totals

Title	Yellow	Green	Current System	Proposed Change
District 1	2	4	Yellow Wins	Green Wins
District 2	5	1	Yellow Wins	Yellow Wins
District 3	2	4	Yellow Wins	Green Wins
District 4	5	1	Yellow Wins	Yellow Wins
Total	14 (58%)	10 (42%)	Yellow 4-0	Yellow 2 - Green 2

***Plus the County Commissioner President which makes the board 3-2 (60% Yellow, 40% Green) and more representative of the actual vote totals

