

Joe Anderson
President

January 25, 2021

Patricia Samford
Vice President

Subject: HB0655: Local Government – County Commissioner Elections – District Voting Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee – February 9th, 2021

Larry O'Brien
Secretary

FAVORABLE

Chandler Wyatt
Treasurer

Dear Senator Pinsky and members of the Committee,

Melina Cavathas
Director

We request a favorable finding for HB0655, Local Government – County Commissioner Elections – District Voting with amendment.

Captain Will Gates
Director

The history of who gets elected in St. Mary's county is germane to our perspective on this bill. Since the county government structure formed more than 350 years ago, we have been led nearly exclusively by white men. The first person of color to be elected, and the only person-of-color ever to sit as county commissioner in St. Mary's county, was John G. Lancaster who won the vote in 1986 and was re-elected in 1990. The first female to be elected was Barbara R. Thompson in 1990, and re-elected in 1994 along with the second woman to serve, Francis Eagan. Since then, just two more women have served—Shelby Guazzo and Julie Randall both serving 1998-2002. Since Lancaster was elected in 1986, 40 other seats on the county commissioners of St. Mary's county were white men. According to the 2019 census estimates, St. Mary's county is 14.9% self-identified African American or Black residents—yet since 1986 we have elected just one in 45 black commissioners. In this same timeframe, we elected just four women. Slightly more than 2% elected were black and 4.5% were female.

John Giusti
Director

Emily Jackson
Director

Captain Paul Kellam
Director

David Lewis
Director

Bob Paul
Director


John Spinicchia
Director

Elaine Szymkowiak
Director

St. Mary's county, like many other local jurisdictions, is suffering from a lack of equitable representation on the board of county commissioners. This impacts the well-being of the county and the management of the county's resources. Arguably both women and people-of-color will bring to the table ideas and perspectives more aligned with our mission for sustainability and for the protection of resources such as forested lands, healthy waterways, and rural character. Women and people-of-color are not a threat to small business interests or to economic prosperity. The current system of county-wide elections for all seats at our county commissioner table is enabling the continuance of white male dominance and representation inequality. Americans, including a large majority here in St. Mary's county, no longer support antiquated and dysfunctional caste-based government.

This bill is one step we can take to begin to break down this old tradition of white males running local governments. Let's let the people in each district decide who they want to represent them. Please return a favorable finding for HB0655.

Yours truly,



Joseph Anderson, president