

Dear Chairman Pinsky and Members of the Senate Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee,

As residents and property owners in Queen Anne's County, Maryland, we respectfully oppose House Bill 655 and ask you to issue an unfavorable report. This bill would impose a government mandate in direct opposition to the established will of the people of Queen Anne's County and weaken minority representation in Commissioner elections.

In 2016 the citizens of Queen Anne's County already decided this issue by a general election ballot question. The citizens strongly responded that we did not choose to change our system of voting for Commissioners to a voting by district system. If this bill is to proceed, Queen Anne's County must be excluded to preserve local control.

Voters in Queen Anne's County already have effective representation by district. Currently in Queen Anne's County, four Commissioner candidates must live in and represent one of four districts with one candidate representing the County at-large. Citizens have the power to vote for all five County Commissioners, and therefore they have the power to hold all five Commissioners accountable for the policy decisions they make that impact all County residents. The citizens rejected the idea of giving up three of our five votes through a voting by district system.

A voting by district system would take voting power out of the hands of citizens and put it into the hands of special interests. As a result we would see less government accountability and more D.C. style pork barrel politics and stalemate, with each Commissioner competing for benefits for their own district rather than doing the good of the County as a whole. We are a small county and all people have equal opportunity to participate in the system.

If the purpose of the bill sponsors is to ensure racial equity in Commissioner elections, they will be doing the opposite by imposing this bill on Queen Anne's County. In our County, the vast majority of people of color live within our more densely populated districts. By imposing a voting by district system, the state will be shifting the center of voting power away from voters in the more densely populated districts to wealthy property owners in the rural districts of the County. This would leave the people and especially minority voters powerless to hold our Commissioners accountable.

For these reasons, we respectfully ask you to exclude Queen Anne's County or otherwise issue an unfavorable report on House Bill 655.

Sincerely,
Patrick and Laura Knickman
Stevensville, Queen Anne's County District 3, Maryland