

Mr. Chair, Madam Vice Chair, and members of the Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee:

I am David Deaderick, a 26-year resident of Lexington Park in St. Mary's County. I speak in support of HB 655.

The method of electing district members to the board of county commissioners through at-large, county-wide voting – currently the practice in just a few of Maryland's counties – is out of step with the principles of representational government. Because it allows those outside a voting district to participate in elections specific to that district, it overwhelms the electoral power of the very people district membership purports to represent. It is, therefore, a system that is lacking in justice and abounding in discrimination.

The current practice robs people within each commissioner district of their vote on matters of concern within the district. It yields instead to the influence of those who potentially have no concern for those matters, whether of policy, infrastructure, or relief so critical to the district. Thus, it nullifies votes, taking away from citizens the very representation that a democracy is designed to ensure, subjecting their votes to gerrymandering – without bothering to change district boundaries.

It is fundamental to democratic elections that the people within a jurisdiction be empowered to elect their own representatives. To deny them this power is to engage arguably in a form of voter suppression by diluting their vote and denying proper representation.

The citizens of Virginia do not vote for Maryland's governor or U.S. Senators. The citizens of Montgomery County do not vote in elections for St. Mary's County's representatives to the Maryland General Assembly. No, our system of elections is based on the principle that those who do the representing are elected by those who will be represented.

HB 655 will make sure that this principle is followed. It will make districts more representative, giving electoral power where it belongs with a precision that a system of representative government intends. This is not a partisan issue for me. I advocate for this bill because I seek to strengthen democracy by upholding the right of voters to elect their own officials without influence from outside their judicatory. Thus, I ask for a favorable report on this bill.

