

Please Support HB 655.pdf

Uploaded by: Lewis, Roderick

Position: FAV

Please Support HB 655

Dear Chairwoman and members of the Senate EHE Committee,

I have been a St. Mary's County resident for 8 years, 7 of those years were in the Lexington Park area. As an active community member when I first moved to this county I researched the government structure, and was shocked to learn that every district commissioner was essentially an at-large representative. This county is incredibly diverse from the 7th district to Lexington Park and every voter deserves to have a commissioner that's not only from their district but elected by a plurality of votes from their district only. The President of the county commission should be the only at-large representative. The current system is undemocratic because it unjustly dilutes votes. This bill is about fair representation Senators period, point, blank. The only reason not to support this good pro-democracy legislation is the up-hold of the current power dynamic that has kept many in this community voiceless in local government. Senators, I strongly urge you to support a favorable report on HD 655. Be democracy champions, some issues rise above local courtesy. Please support local democracy in Maryland. Thank you

Sincerely,

Roderick C. Lewis Jr.
Community Member

Co-Chair, St. Mary's County NAACP Political Action Committee

HB655 - Local Elections-County Commissioner & Coun

Uploaded by: Tulkin, Josh

Position: FAV



7338 Baltimore Ave
Suite 102
College Park, MD 20740

Committee: Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs
Testimony on: HB 655 – “Local Elections – County Commissioner and County Boards of Elections – District Voting”
Position: Favorable
Hearing Date: March 23, 2021

The Maryland Sierra Club urges a favorable report on HB655. This bill would improve democratic representation in certain Maryland counties which have county commissioners or board of education members who currently are elected at-large to represent a specific district. The bill would require that those commissioners and board of education members to be chosen by voters within their district instead of being chosen by all voters in their county.

The Sierra Club and its members care about both the natural and human environments, including ending racial and social injustice. Based on our review of the electoral circumstances in the counties affected by this legislation, we believe that specifying that district county commissioners and district school board members be elected by, and responsible to, the voters in their district will increase the diversity of viewpoints among those bodies as a whole, and increase the attention to local concerns and needs in each of these counties.

As a grassroots environmental advocacy group, the Sierra Club firmly believes that effective change often is exercised locally. We believe that a more representative democracy, achieved through direct representation, will result in greater stewardship of both the natural and human environments. A strong principle of democracy is that officials should be elected by the people they represent.

We urge a favorable report on HB655, as amended by the House of Delegates.

Rich Norling
Chair, Political Committee
Rich.Norling@MDSierra.org

Josh Tulkin
Chapter Director
Josh.Tulkin@MDSierra.org

Founded in 1892, the Sierra Club is America’s oldest and largest grassroots environmental organization. The Maryland Chapter has over 70,000 members and supporters, and the Sierra Club nationwide has approximately 800,000 members.

HB 655 Local Elections- County Commissioner and Co

Uploaded by: White, Kadi-Ann

Position: FAV

March 23, 2021

Testimony on HB 655
Local Elections- County Commissioner and County Board of Education- District Voting
Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

Position: Favorable

Common Cause Maryland supports HB 655, which would require that candidates running for the position of county commissioner in Calvert, Charles, Garrett, Queen Anne’s or St. Mary’s county would need to be elected only by voters within that particular district. This amendment to current voting laws in these counties, would ensure that commissioners are elected solely by district members and not the entire county. District members should have the ability to vote for their representatives without fear of outside influence or the lack of interest shown by commissioners.

In a recent article, Maryland Matters quoted Yuriy Rudensky who is the redistricting counsel in the Brennan Center for Justice’s Democracy Program on his views on the impact of the bill. He stated that the use of at-large systems “was a response to the end of slavery and the 15th Amendment and the expansion of the right to vote to Black folks. It was one of the tools that was used to ensure that areas that had significant Black populations — but that weren’t majority-Black — couldn’t fully exercise their vote.”

To add, certain counties such as St. Mary’s County where there is a large discrepancy in racial demographics would benefit from the passing of this bill. The county is currently 78.1% white, 15.2% Black and 4.5% Hispanic. Assuming that the majority of each racial demographic votes in a typical county commissioner election, the population that is predominantly white would have more influence on deciding on a commissioner. With this mind, certain districts that are predominantly one race would not benefit from this combination. The citizens of these counties deserve to have fair and just representation by those who care for their needs.

Common Cause Maryland strongly supports the effort to move towards a fairer voting system in which the opinions of citizens are prioritized and proper representation is given. We support HB 655 and encourage a favorable vote.

Kadi-Ann White, Legislative Fellow
Common Cause Maryland

HB655_StrongFutureMaryland_EHEA_FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Wilkerson, Alice

Position: FAV



**House Bill 655 (Delegate Crosby)
Local Government – County Commissioner Elections – District Voting
FAVORABLE**

March 23, 2021

Dear Chair Pinsky and Esteemed Members of the Committee:

On behalf of Strong Future Maryland we write in support of House Bill 655. Strong Future Maryland works to advance bold, progressive policy changes to address systemic inequality and promote a sustainable, just, and prosperous economic future for all Marylanders. We urge you to support this legislation to provide voting rights protections and fair representation of minority voters.

This legislation is necessary for providing fair representation across our state. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 bans voter discrimination, however, voter disenfranchisement is still happening in five counties in our state. These counties conduct county elections as at-large elections despite the county commissioners being elected to represent a specific district. This is both contrary to the intent and purpose of district representation and is out of line with what a majority of counties in the state do. Voting at-large and not allowing for true district representation does not provide for equal representation.

As an example, St. Mary's County elects its four district commissioners at-large. This completely dilutes the voting power of non-white voters in Lexington Park and Great Mills, resulting in the disenfranchisement of African-American residents and inadequate representation of the people in these communities. HB655 would require that any district official be elected by a plurality of the voters who live within that district, rather than allowing a district to be represented by someone who receives a plurality of votes at-large but not within the district.

We urge you to give HB655 a favorable report to support fair representation across the entire state of Maryland.

*John B. King Jr.
Founder and Board Chair*

*Alice Wilkerson
Executive Director*

info@strongfuturemd.org

PO Box 164 | Arnold MD 21012

240-643-0024 | strongfuturemd.org

 @FutureMaryland  @StrongFutureMD

Yokley testimony HB 0655.pdf

Uploaded by: Yokley, Elizabeth

Position: FWA

Madam Chair, Mr. Vice Chair, and members of the House Ways and Means Committee. My name is Liz Yokley. I am a resident of Great Mills, MD.

As a government teacher at Great Mills High School, I teach my sophomores about the Constitution and representative democracy. We are currently learning about how states draw districts to elect members of the House of Representatives and House of Delegates. What is the point of having a county commissioner represent a district if they are not elected from that district?

I am a resident of the 4th Commissioner District of St. Mary's County. Our district encompasses the population center of the county. Our demographics vary greatly from the rest of the county; to name just a few examples from our largest town: in the 2010 census St. Mary's County was 15% African American while Lexington Park was 37% African American, 7.7% of St. Mary's County lived in poverty while 13.9% of Lexington Park did, 71% of our county residents live in a home they own, while only 38.7% of the residents of Lexington Park do. The residents of my District have vastly different interests than the rest of the county, yet the entire county gets to vote for our Commissioner, diluting the votes of the people who live here. This is disenfranchisement, plain and simple.

Our Commissioner does not represent the best interests of most of our district, yet the majority has no chance of electing someone who does if at-large voting continues. Our commissioner offers no problem-solving ideas, no encouragement, no understanding. He does not look to make positive change. He does not work for the good of our District, he does not represent our needs, but rather works to please the voters throughout the rest of the county. He makes rude, judgmental comments such as: "These kids are out there running around with guns, they don't have a conscience, it's a mess out here." (The Enterprise 9/4/20) He speaks ill of our youth but does not vote in favor of initiatives that could help them. Our community has been working toward a community center for years. Our commissioner should be leading the way, not standing in the way. At a March for Equality held in our county in June 2020 our Commissioner said in his remarks: "I want to welcome you to your governmental center because I'd be willing to bet nine out of ten of you have never been here before." My students, my children, my community are not represented by this man. I am asking for a favorable report. Please give us the opportunity to fairly elect someone who will be an advocate for our community.

HB 655 OPPOSE Senate Testimony - Eric Colvin.pdf

Uploaded by: Colvin, Eric

Position: UNF

ST. MARY'S COUNTY GOVERNMENT

COMMISSIONERS OF
ST. MARY'S COUNTY

Eric Colvin



James R. Guy, President
Eric Colvin, Commissioner
Michael L. Hewitt, Commissioner
Todd B. Morgan, Commissioner
John E. O'Connor, Commissioner

March 16, 2021

The Honorable Paul G. Pinsky, Chairman
Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee
2 West
Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: House Bill 655 - Local Government – County Commissioner Elections – District Voting
Hearing: March 18, 2021

Dear Senator Pinsky and the members of the Senate Education, Health, and Environmental
Affairs Committee:

When I was first elected as a County Commissioner, I made a vow to myself that I would never base my decisions on political expediency or reelection desires. I try to approach every decision with the mindset of what is fair, equitable, and best for my county. With that in mind, I am submitting this written testimony in opposition of Delegate Crosby's bill 655 that would change the way that county commissioners are elected.

This bill would result in a fundamental change in how we work. Currently, Commissioners in St. Mary's County are elected by the entire county with the requirement of living in particular districts. This ensures that there is a diverse geographical representation but also ensures that every Commissioner is required to consider the needs of the entire county as a whole.

My concern with Delegate Crosby's proposal is that it could negatively impact districts represented by the party that is not in the majority in the county. This bill would turn the Commissioner job into a mentality of "What can I bring home to my district?" Delegate Crosby has advocated for this bill by pointing out how state and federal representatives operate, and therefore it would be good for the county. I would argue the opposite because our counties are small enough geographic areas that it makes sense to represent the entire county. As Commissioners, we need to think about the overall good for the entire county, not just one area—and I would argue that the county is a small enough region that this method works!

My fear and concern are that this proposal will fragment and harm local governance. Delegate Crosby has argued that areas of his district do not receive adequate resources or representation at the local level—this is false. The area he speaks of has more parks than any other region of the county, the only county-owned and operated swimming pool, county-run gymnastics center, sprayground, skate park, one of the three libraries in the county, and multiple other ongoing

projects. The argument I would make is that because we are elected to represent the county as a whole, we are able to provide resources exactly where they are needed and not solely based on the concept of "bringing home the bacon" to our districts. The change that Delegate Crosby has proposed could result in fewer resources going to his own district's citizens.

Thank you all for the work that you do and for receiving this testimony on the bill. I wish you continued success and ask that you do not hesitate to reach back if there is any additional information that I can provide to help your decision-making.

Sincerely,



Eric Colvin
County Commissioner, District 1
St. Mary's County

HB655 Testimony.pdf

Uploaded by: Gray, Vernon

Position: UNF

Testimony AGAINST

HB 655 – Local Elections – County Commissioner and County Boards of Education – District Voting

Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee

March 23, 2021

Without prior consultation with the Commissioners of St. Mary's County and the members of the county's delegation to the Maryland General Assembly or publicizing his proposal and seeking public support, Delegate Brian M. Crosby introduced HB 655 to arbitrarily change the election of county commissioners from at-large to by-district voting. He blindsided everyone because there is no public demand for making this change and crafted the Bill to include other counties to circumvent the role of the other St. Mary's County Delegation members. He has not acted in good faith in the legislative deliberation process.

In his earlier testimony before the House Ways and Means Committee, Delegate Crosby writes, "This bill is about fairness, equality, and diversity," which is a pretext to disguise a blatant politically motivated scheme to gain an advantage in the 2022 elections.

Delegate Crosby claims that at-large voting disenfranchises non-white voters, specifically in the Lexington Park and Great Mills area of St. Mary's County, which has a large population of ethnic minorities and a Democratic Party majority. This area is the primary reason for the proposed conversion to by-district voting in 2022. However, Delegate Crosby fails to mention that in the 2014 and 2018 elections, the voters in this area were disenfranchised by the Democratic Party's failure to present a candidate for county commissioner residing in that area.

Delegate Crosby seeks to delegitimize at-large voting by referring to the past discriminatory "Jim Crow era" that ended with the Voting Rights Act of 1965. He alleges that at-large voting is a violation of that law but offers no proof of a present-day discriminatory effect by at-large voting in St. Mary's County. A violation is established if it is shown that the political processes leading to nomination or election are not equally open to participation (52 USC 10301).

Ethnic minority election opportunity in St. Mary's County elections is evidenced by the participation of African American candidates in seven of nine county commissioner election cycles beginning in 1986. The argument that at-large elections are an election impediment to African Americans is also refuted by a member of the school board who has been elected and served for 26 years, an African American elected to the board of county commissioners (1986-94), and as the Sheriff (1977-82). Nothing in the Voting Rights Act of 1965 establishes a right to have members of an ethnic minority elected in numbers equal to their proportion in the population.

At-large voting in St. Mary's County is competitive. The registration of voters is 42% Republican, 35% Democrat, and 23% Others. Election success is a factor of voter turnout and candidates' appeal to the whole of the electorate. Notably, there were no complaints with the at-large voting system in St. Mary's County so long as the elections consistently favored Democrats.

Delegate Crosby seeks to eliminate at-large voting to facilitate a 2022 election outcome by a numerical advantage in the ethnic composition and political affiliation in a Lexington Park/Great Mills commissioner district. He would effectively institute, encourage and exploit racial bloc voting. However, in doing so, he would create on a smaller scale the same circumstances that he attributes to at-large voting.

Delegate Crosby writes, "I believe that the citizens of each county commissioner district have the right to select who represents their interests without influence from voters outside their district." This mindset would add parochial divisiveness to the existing discord in politics and is contrary to a desired post-election sense of community by the county commissioners. How many commissioner districts would he create to appease different ethnic interests and isolate each from outside influences? His argument that only through by-district voting can authentic ethnic representation be achieved indicates a deep-seated belief in hyper-multiculturalist ideology and identity politics that corrupts participatory democracy.

I recommend that the Committee disapprove HB 655. If not, then I would argue that HB 655 should be amended to authorize without petition a referendum to be held in St. Mary's County to allow the voters the opportunity to decide whether they want to make this change in local elections, a choice denied by Delegate Crosby.

Thank you for your consideration.

Vernon Gray
St. Mary's County, MD

HB 655 OPPOSE St. Marys Calvert.pdf

Uploaded by: Guy, Randy

Position: UNF

ST. MARY'S COUNTY GOVERNMENT
**COMMISSIONERS OF
ST. MARY'S COUNTY**



James R. Guy, President
Eric Colvin, Commissioner
Michael L. Hewitt, Commissioner
Todd B. Morgan, Commissioner
John E. O'Connor, Commissioner

House Bill 655

Local Elections - County Commissioner and County Boards of Education - District Voting

OPPOSE

March 16, 2021

Senator Paul G. Pinsky, *Chair*
Maryland Senate Education, Health & Environmental Affairs Committee
Miller Senate Office Building, 2 West
11 Bladen St., Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: **HB 655** - Local Elections – County Commissioner and County Boards of Education –
District Voting - Hearing Date: March 18, 2021

Dear Chairman Pinsky:

The Commissioners of St. Mary's County, in concert with the Board of County Commissioners of Calvert County, **OPPOSE** HB 655 - Local Elections – County Commissioner and County Boards of Education – District Voting - as amended, which is being heard on March 18, 2021 in the Education, Health & Environmental Affairs Committee. This legislation, as drafted, sets an unreasonable expectation for a change like this to be forced on any county without community input and feedback.

The Commissioners of the three Southern Maryland Counties, St. Mary's County, Calvert County and Charles County met with the Southern Maryland Delegation on Friday, March 12, 2021 to discuss HB 655 as amended. After much discussion, St. Mary's County and Calvert Counties feel that a voter referendum to decide how voting should be conducted in their respective counties should be put forth to the voters in an open and transparent manner in the 2022 election.

The Commissioners of St. Mary's County and Calvert County request the following amendment that would allow this bill, upon passage, to go to a voter referendum for the people of St. Mary's County and Calvert County to decide and vote on in the 2022 election:

- Content of HB 655 –County Commissioner and County Boards of Education - District Voting (plurality voting)

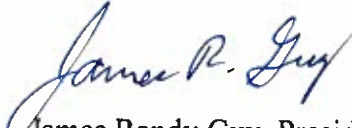
Page 2

Senator Paul G. Pinsky, *Chair*


March 16, 2021

We OPPOSE HB 655 as amended and believe this legislation would not benefit the citizens of St. Mary's County and Calvert County nor would it serve their best interest. We, as two Southern Maryland counties most impacted, request consideration of this amendment which would allow the citizens of St. Mary's County and Calvert County to make the decision. It is our goal for our citizens be heard and be part of an open and transparent process by allowing them to make these decisions at the local level. It is our hope that local courtesy would be respected.

Sincerely,
COMMISSIONERS OF ST. MARY'S COUNTY


James Randy Guy, President

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS OF
CALVERT COUNTY, MARYLAND


Earl F. Hance, President

CSMC/AB/sf
T:/Consent/2021/076

Cc: President of Senate, Bill Ferguson
Senator Arthur Ellis
Senator Michael Jackson
Senator Jack Bailey
Delegate Matthew Morgan
Delegate Gerald Clark
Delegate Brian Crosby
Commissioner Eric Colvin
Commissioner Michael Hewitt
Commissioner Todd Morgan
Commissioner John O'Connor
Dr. Rebecca Bridgett, County Administrator
David Weiskopf, County Attorney

HB 655 LOO Final.pdf

Uploaded by: Hale, Terry

Position: UNF

Danielle Hornberger
County Executive

Dan Schneckenburger
Director of Administration

Office: 410.996.5202
Email: dhornberger@ccgov.org



Robert Meffley
Council President

Jackie Gregory
Vice President

Office: 410.996.5201
Email: council@ccgov.org

CECIL COUNTY GOVERNMENT
Cecil County Administration Building
200 Chesapeake Boulevard, Elkton, MD 21921

March 16, 2021

The Hon. Paul G. Pinsky, Chair
Senate Education, Health, and
Environmental Affairs Committee
2 West Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: HB 655 Local Government – County Commissioners Elections- District Voting
Letter of Opposition

Dear Chairman Pinsky and members of the Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee:

The County Executive and County Council of Cecil County unanimously oppose HB 655 Local Government County Commissioners Elections-District Voting, which will be heard by your committee on March 23, 2021.

It is our understanding that this legislation as amended will require all counties to elect county commissioners and county boards of education within their district, and not countywide.

This legislation takes away the right of each county to determine their own choice in electing their county commissioners and county boards of education. One size does not fit all. Rural counties may have so few voters in a specific district that it would not be practical.

The County Executive and Cecil County Council of Cecil County respectfully request that the Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee find an unfavorable report on HB 655.

Sincerely;

Handwritten signature of Danielle Hornberger in blue ink.

Danielle Hornberger
Cecil County Executive

Handwritten signature of Robert Meffley in blue ink.

Robert Meffley
Council President

Copy: Cecil County Delegation

www.ccgov.org

HB 655 - Letter of Opposition - St. Mary's and Cal

Uploaded by: Hance, Earl

Position: UNF

ST. MARY'S COUNTY GOVERNMENT
**COMMISSIONERS OF
ST. MARY'S COUNTY**



James R. Guy, President
Eric Colvin, Commissioner
Michael L. Hewitt, Commissioner
Todd B. Morgan, Commissioner
John E. O'Connor, Commissioner

House Bill 655

Local Elections - County Commissioner and County Boards of Education - District Voting

OPPOSE

March 16, 2021

Senator Paul G. Pinsky, *Chair*
Maryland Senate Education, Health & Environmental Affairs Committee
Miller Senate Office Building, 2 West
11 Bladen St., Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: **HB 655** - Local Elections – County Commissioner and County Boards of Education –
District Voting - Hearing Date: March 18, 2021

Dear Chairman Pinsky:

The Commissioners of St. Mary's County, in concert with the Board of County Commissioners of Calvert County, **OPPOSE** HB 655 - Local Elections – County Commissioner and County Boards of Education – District Voting - as amended, which is being heard on March 18, 2021 in the Education, Health & Environmental Affairs Committee. This legislation, as drafted, sets an unreasonable expectation for a change like this to be forced on any county without community input and feedback.

The Commissioners of the three Southern Maryland Counties, St. Mary's County, Calvert County and Charles County met with the Southern Maryland Delegation on Friday, March 12, 2021 to discuss HB 655 as amended. After much discussion, St. Mary's County and Calvert Counties feel that a voter referendum to decide how voting should be conducted in their respective counties should be put forth to the voters in an open and transparent manner in the 2022 election.

The Commissioners of St. Mary's County and Calvert County request the following amendment that would allow this bill, upon passage, to go to a voter referendum for the people of St. Mary's County and Calvert County to decide and vote on in the 2022 election:

- Content of HB 655 –County Commissioner and County Boards of Education - District Voting (plurality voting)

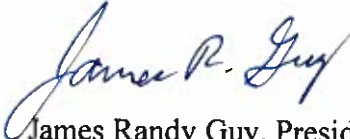
Page 2

Senator Paul G. Pinsky, *Chair*


March 16, 2021

We OPPOSE HB 655 as amended and believe this legislation would not benefit the citizens of St. Mary's County and Calvert County nor would it serve their best interest. We, as two Southern Maryland counties most impacted, request consideration of this amendment which would allow the citizens of St. Mary's County and Calvert County to make the decision. It is our goal for our citizens be heard and be part of an open and transparent process by allowing them to make these decisions at the local level. It is our hope that local courtesy would be respected.

Sincerely,
COMMISSIONERS OF ST. MARY'S COUNTY


James Randy Guy, President

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS OF
CALVERT COUNTY, MARYLAND


Earl F. Hance, President

CSMC/AB/sf
T:/Consent/2021/076

Cc: President of Senate, Bill Ferguson
Senator Arthur Ellis
Senator Michael Jackson
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Delegate Matthew Morgan
Delegate Gerald Clark
Delegate Brian Crosby
Commissioner Eric Colvin
Commissioner Michael Hewitt
Commissioner Todd Morgan
Commissioner John O'Connor
Dr. Rebecca Bridgett, County Administrator
David Weiskopf, County Attorney

HB655_QAC_Moran_UNF.pdf

Uploaded by: Moran, James

Position: UNF



*Queen
Anne's
County*

**THE COUNTY COMMISSIONERS OF
QUEEN ANNE'S COUNTY**

The Liberty Building
107 North Liberty Street
Centreville, MD 21617

e-mail: QACCommissioners&Administrator@qac.org

County Commissioners:

James J. Moran, At Large
Jack N. Wilson, Jr., District 1
Stephen Wilson, District 2
Philip L. Dumenil, District 3
Christopher M. Corchiarino, District 4

*County Administrator: Todd R. Todd, PE
Executive Assistant to County Commissioners: Margie A. Houck
County Attorney: Patrick Thompson, Esquire*

February 1, 2021

The Honorable Delegate Anne R. Kaiser
Ways and Means Committee
House Office Building, Room 131
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: HB 655 - Local Government – County Commissioner Elections – District Voting

Dear Delegate Kaiser:

Please consider this letter of opposition for House Bill 655. This bill would require an election of a county commissioner to represent a district to be decided by a plurality of the votes cast within that district; and generally relating to county commissioner elections. A candidate for county commissioner would no longer need to receive an absolute majority to represent a district but to only receives more than their running mates.

Thank you for the opportunity to oppose this legislation.

Respectfully,

QUEEN ANNE'S COUNTY
BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

Christopher M. Corchiarino, President

Stephen Wilson

Philip L. Dumenil

James J. Moran

Jack N. Wilson, Jr.

HB0655-EHE_MACo_OPP.pdf

Uploaded by: Sanderson, Michael

Position: UNF



House Bill 655

Local Government - County Commissioner Elections - District Voting

MACo Position: **OPPOSE**

To: Education, Health, and Environmental
Affairs Committee

Date: March 23, 2021

From: Michael Sanderson

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **OPPOSES** HB 655. This bill would mandate the method by which county commissioners are elected to represent specified districts. Counties are concerned this one-size-fits-all approach would infringe on local autonomy and flexibility in local governance.

The method and structure of county elections are matters reasonably left to those governed. Currently, that authority is properly vested in county governing bodies, regardless of their local structure of governance. County commissioners are elected at-large, by district, or by a combination of these methods. This bill would usurp local authority by requiring the election of a commissioner to represent a specific district to be decided by a plurality of votes cast within that district. In American jurisprudence, the proper venue to remedy any defect in district-drawing or representative structures is the courts, rather than a superior political body.

MACo generally stands for the ability of county governments, guided by their locally elected officials, to serve and react to community needs. County governments – who meet regularly year-round and are deeply immersed in the community – are in the best position to manage these local affairs. Local decision-makers are elected to serve public needs, and their actions are subject to broad citizen and stakeholder input, and they are directly accountable to voters. This law would diminish local accountability, and local voter input.

HB 655 would infringe on local autonomy and decision-making by setting an unwarranted and troubling precedent that threatens to erode responsive and accountable governance. Accordingly, MACo requests an **UNFAVORABLE** report on HB 655.