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Suite 102  
College Park, MD 20740

**Committee: Ways and Means**

**Testimony on: HB 655 “Local Government - County Commissioner Elections - District Voting”**

**Position: Favorable**

**Hearing Date: February 9, 2021**

The Maryland Sierra Club urges a favorable report on HB 655. This bill that would improve democratic representation in certain Maryland counties which have commissioner forms of government by requiring that county commissioners who currently are elected to represent a specific district in their county be chosen by voters within their district instead of being chosen by all voters in their county. It is our understanding that the bill would require a change in the methods used to elect county commissioners in Calvert, Charles, Garrett, Queen Anne’s, and St. Mary’s Counties, which currently allow all voters in the county to vote for commissioners who are to represent a specific district.

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 ensuring that district county commissioners are elected by and responsible to the voters in their district will increase the diversity of viewpoints among the county commissioners 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. In these counties, we believe that a more representative democracy, achieved through direct representation, will result in greater stewardship of both the natural and human environments.

We urge a favorable report on HB655.

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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.