

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.