



HB 447

Local Elections - County Commissioner - District Voting

OPPOSE

February 14, 2023

The Honorable Vanessa Atterbeary, Chairman
House Ways and Means Committee
Room 131, House Office Building
6 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Chairman Atterbeary and the Members of the Ways and Means Committee:

I am writing to express my opposition to HB 447 – Local Elections – County Commissioner – District Voting. I want to thank you for reading my testimony and keeping an open mind in hearing my reasons for opposing this legislation. I apologize that I am not able to attend in person to testify, I will be in a previously scheduled Budget Work Session for our FY24 County Budget. My opposition to HB 447 can be summarized in three points.

First, if this bill passes, it will remove the ability of our county citizens to vote for three of the sitting commissioners. Currently citizens can vote for all five commissioners. All five commissioners build the budget, authorize the projects, and set the priorities for St. Mary's County. All five commissioners vote on spending resident's tax dollars. Every citizen should be allowed to vote on all five of the commissioners who have this authority. Taking away the ability to vote for three of the commissioners does not help to empower anyone.

Second, if this bill passes, it will result in a fundamental change in the way our county government is selected and operates—a change that would happen without the input of any of the county residents. Citizens should be allowed to vote on a fundamental change to their form of government. This is an incredibly important and basic principle of our society, every citizen should be able to have a voice in changing the government. This proposed change should go to a referendum that allows the residents to determine if they want the change.

Third, my fear is that if this bill passes, it will be bad for St. Mary's County. Simply put, right now we commissioners are elected by the entire county, we represent the entire county, and we are able to allocate resources (tax dollars for programs and projects) to where they are most needed in the county. It is an equitable allocation of resources. If this bill passes, each

commissioner will be beholden to only the voters in the district where they live, and I don't think it is a stretch that it will result in a more equal distribution of resources. Equality in resource distribution sounds fair, but will make it harder to address specific needs in our county. An easy real life example is that under the current system, Commissioners from outside of District 4 were able to allocate resources for a needed community center in District 4 in St. Mary's County. This likely would not have happened if HB 447 had been in place.

I ask that you respect the will of the citizens of St. Mary's County and grant an unfavorable opinion of HB 447. Thank you for your time and the work you do.

Sincerely,



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