



THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

**HB 447: Local Elections – County Commissioner - District Voting**

**Position: FAVORABLE**

Good afternoon Madam Chair, Madam Vice Chair, and honorable members of the Ways and Means Committee. I am Delegate Brian Crosby, and I am here to present HB 447, entitled Local Elections – County Commissioner – District Voting.

For decades, several counties in Maryland – including my county, St. Mary's – have operated under an at-large voting system for County Commissioner elections. Although these County Commissioners are required to reside in the district they represent, they run in at-large, county-wide elections. This system dilutes voters' votes. This bill will require County Commissioners who are elected to represent a specific district, be elected solely by the voters registered to vote within that district.

This bill will affect eight counties, but only four counties will have to make any change, because the other four have already made this change.

Voters deserve to have a say in who will represent them on the Board of County Commissioners, without their voices being drowned out by the rest of the voters in the county. The at-large election system leaves voters without a true advocate for each community's unique needs, because Commissioners have to appeal to the entire county in order to win their election.

The current system is analogous to voters from all 50 states having the ability to vote for Maryland's elected representatives to the U.S. Congress, and defending it with the rationale that Congress makes laws that affect the entire country, so Members should be beholden to the entire country. I believe we are all in agreement that our state's 10-member Congressional delegation are better able to prioritize our state's interests in Congress than they would be if they were elected by the entire country.

Put another way, the current system of at-large voting is analogous to every registered voter in Maryland being allowed to vote for every seat in the General Assembly. It would be as if voters from Hagerstown, Federick, Elkridge, Easton, and Salisbury could vote for who will represent St. Mary's County in the General Assembly.

In addition to diluting votes, at-large voting makes it disproportionately harder for candidates to run for office who are from low-income communities. A successful political campaign requires fundraising, and for both the candidate and their volunteers to have reliable transportation and time to give. Candidates who can solicit contributions and recruit volunteers from wealthier communities, and who have reliable transportation, are generally more well-resourced and more likely to win. Requiring candidates whose constituency is from a lower-income community to appeal to voters who do not live in their district, and to raise the

funds and organize the people power needed to reach voters beyond their community, puts them at an unfair disadvantage. At-large voting also places a burden on candidates to require them to travel a farther geographic distance for votes from outside their district. This makes campaigns more expensive to run, yet there is a strong and clear public desire for campaigns to become less expensive to run.

One consequence of this is that the current system discourages candidates from running for office who believe they would represent their own district well, but who do not believe they can win countywide.

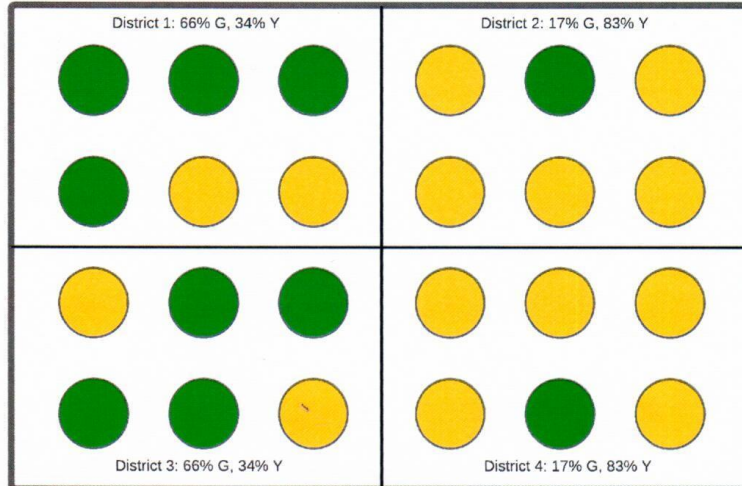
This bill would create more fair representation in local government, and allow voters to elect candidates who will represent their district without the interference of voters who do not live in their district, and who may not share their interests or priorities. Voters should have the ability to elect their representatives, who will advocate for resources on their behalf.

Imagine for a moment that the two major political parties are represented by the colors green and yellow. And imagine that in a county, there are 4 Commissioner districts. In districts 1 and 3, the majority of voters voted for the color green. In districts 2 and 4, the majority of voters voted for the color yellow. However, the margin of victory was bigger in districts 2 and 4 than in 1 and 3, so the color green will receive 0 seats on the Board of County Commissioners, and the color yellow will receive four. I have included a graphic on the next page to illustrate this example.

Thank you for your consideration of this bill. I respectfully request a favorable report.



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Despite winning a majority of votes in two separate districts, the at-large voting system will result in 4 Y victories and 0 G victories, instead of a more representative 2 Y and 2 G.



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## Vote Totals

Title	Yellow	Green	Current System	Proposed Change
District 1	2	4	Yellow Wins	Green Wins
District 2	5	1	Yellow Wins	Yellow Wins
District 3	2	4	Yellow Wins	Green Wins
District 4	5	1	Yellow Wins	Yellow Wins
<b>Total</b>	<b>14 (58%)</b>	<b>10 (42%)</b>	<b>Yellow 4-0</b>	<b>Yellow 2 - Green 2</b>