

**House Ways and Means Committee**  
**February 10, 2023**

**HB 447 - FAVORABLE**

Dear Chair Atterbeary, Vice Chair Wilkins, and distinguished members of the committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to share my **favorable position on HB 447** which would require that county commissioners in the state of Maryland would be elected by a plurality of the vote in their own districts, rather than at-large. I support this bill for the following reasons:

- County level government is currently the only level of government where voters from outside the represented area can vote for the representative of that area. No one outside the U.S. votes for our president. No one outside Maryland votes for Maryland U.S. Senators. No one outside U.S. House Districts votes for our House members. No one outside of Maryland District 29 votes for my State Senator or outside 29B votes for my State Delegate. It makes no sense that this would be different at the county level.
- The population of St. Mary's County is currently about 72% White, 14% Black, 6% Hispanic and 3% Asian. However, the district containing Lexington Park and Great Mills has a much higher minority population than the county as a whole. When the entire county population votes for each district, the voters in that district have their voices diminished. This results in disenfranchisement of African American residents and inadequate representation of the people in these communities.
- When commissioners get votes from the entire county, they are not incentivized to fight for their own district's needs, which may be quite different from the needs of the county as a whole. I have seen first-hand how this negatively impacts the citizens of Lexington Park. In that area, 13.7 percent of households are below the poverty rate, according to a survey covering 2013 to 2017 from the U.S. Census Bureau's small-area income and poverty estimates, compared to 8.5 percent in the county overall, 9.3 percent in Maryland. However, the commissioner who has represented that district for the past 12 years has consistently voted against funding for programs in that area such as a homeless shelter and a youth community center.
- Detractors of this bill believe that commissioners elected by district will not be concerned with the county as a whole. But at the end of the day, the five commissioners vote on all proposal, and that will be how the county gets governed.

The current at-large system of voting for County Commissioner in St. Mary's County is unfair to the minority population in the county. People who live in a particular district should be able to vote for their own representation. Please vote in favor of HB 447.

Sincerely,

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