

Good afternoon, Chair Atterbeary, Vice Chair Wilkins, and distinguished members of the committee:

My name is Marcia Greenberg, and I live in Lexington Park in St. Mary's County. I am speaking in support of HB 447 to change voting for Commissioners in St. Mary's County from countywide to district-specific.

I have earned degrees from Northwestern University School of Law and the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University. After practicing law, I worked in international development, including work promoting women's political rights within democracy programs funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development. One of our most central objectives was ensuring that citizens could exercise their right to vote in a meaningful way.

I have therefore been deeply dismayed by an election process in St. Mary's County that fundamentally undermines the power of an individual's vote: With at-large voting, one block of voters consistently decides all five Commissioners -- for each and every district. No matter the numbers or preferences of voters in any one district, they are out-voted by the countywide majority. It's that simple -- and it's that wrong.

To illustrate how rigged the system is, I attempt a simple analogy:

Imagine a school where 100 students are promised that they can choose their teachers for five classes: English, biology, history, phys ed, and Spanish. For each class, the students can choose as their teacher *either* a revered sports hero like LeBron James or Tom Brady, *or* an attorney like

Michelle Obama or Stacey Abrams. The students, both boys and girls, feel totally empowered and excited; they start campaigning for their preferred teachers.

Now suppose that in this school there are more girls in the English and biology classes, an equal number of boys and girls in phys ed, and more boys in the history and Spanish classes. Despite their majority and preferences for English and biology, the girls hear that all the boys, who are 55 of 100 in the school, are committed to voting only for the sports heroes – and for all five courses. So the girls get going, working to explain to boys who are their friends, that some of the lawyers would be wonderful teachers. With stellar candidates, and having made compelling arguments, the girls look forward to election day.

Predictably, however, this is what happens:

When votes are cast, it turns out that all 55 boys voted for their sports heroes – for each and every subject. No matter that there are more girls in the English class, the boys' vote prevail; no matter that there are more girls in the biology class, the boys' votes prevail. Although the 45 girls turn out in force, they are not able to prevail in any election. The boys' 55 votes for all courses, including those where they are in the minority, determine that all students will be taught in all classes by male sports heroes.

I apologize for the simplistic analogy, knowing that you, as elected Delegates, understand the many complexities of voting at the local, state and national levels. But with this outdated system in St. Mary's County, we have been sobered by how our own elected officials don't seem to

understand how unfair the system is – how it consistently, election after election, prevents people in a district from electing *their* preferred Commissioner.

Just as girls in the majority in a school's class ought to be able to choose their own teacher, and not be outvoted by the boys' school majority, the majority in our county districts ought to be able to choose their own Commissioner. It makes no sense that the same block of voters – comparable to the 55 boys in this example – are able to determine the outcomes in each and every election.

Distinguished members of this committee: Please recognize that the system is unfair. It is undemocratic. And it must be changed.

In closing, I urge this committee to issue a favorable report on HB 447.
Thank you!