



Maryland
Holding Power Accountable

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**Testimony on HB 447
Local Elections – County Commissioner – District Voting
Ways & Means**

Position: Favorable

Common Cause Maryland supports HB 447, which corrects an issue in local jurisdiction where Commission members representing a specific sub-district of the county are elected by all voters within the county – even when voters in that particular sub-district have demographic characteristics that differ from those of the county at large. This can and has led to voters being represented by a commissioner who was elected by a minority of voters in that particular district. In this way, at-large election of district-specific representatives can be used as a way to suppress the interests of a minority group that has majority status only within a particular district or districts of the county.

A basic principle of democracy is that officials should be elected by the people they represent. The institution of in-district voting would end a discriminatory and anti-democratic policy that has historically prevented minority voters from meaningfully engaging with the democratic process. This leads to unfair and ineffective representation that has the overall effect of discouraging voter engagement with their commissioner and with the voting process overall.

We support standards that both protect the right to vote and promote wider civic engagement within the community. Specifying that county commissioners be elected by and responsible to the voters in their district will increase diversity of viewpoints among these bodies as a whole and will focus attention to the specific local concerns and needs in each of these counties.

For these reasons, we urge a favorable report on HB 447.