

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) Charles County Branch

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February 10, 2023

Testimony of Dyotha R Sweat President, Charles County Branch of the NAACP
To the Ways and Means Committee on HB 477
Local Elections-County Commissioner - District Voting

Greetings Chair Atterbeary, Vice-Chair Wilkins, and Members of the Ways and Means Committee

Thank you so much for calling this important hearing as well as for your leadership on this issue. I am submitting this testimony in support of HB 447, on behalf of the Charles County Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the NAACP.

Equity in voting is at the heart of what the NAACP does. And disenfranchisement of any kind is abhorrent to the principles for which we stand.

HB 477 seeks to rectify an injustice happening in counties around the state by requiring that candidates for the Board of County Commissioners win a plurality of the votes in the district they hope to represent. The current practice of electing district commissioners at-large has the dilutes the voting power of non-white voters throughout the state.

Every state- and federal-level representative in Maryland has to win in the district they campaign for. However, four of the five rural counties in the state of Maryland currently elect commissioners to represent specific districts at-large.

Founded in 1909, the NAACP is the nation's oldest and largest nonpartisan civil rights organization. Its members throughout the United States and the world are the premier advocates for civil rights in their communities. You can read more about the NAACP's work and our six "Game Changer" issue areas by visiting [NAACP.org](https://www.naacp.org).

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In St. Mary's County, Maryland, specifically, this results in the systemic disenfranchisement of the vast majority of our non-white voters living in Great Mills and Lexington Park. This unfair practice practically nullifies the voice and votes of the largest community of black and brown people in St. Mary's County, Maryland. The votes of people of color are diluted by votes from the rest of the county- an unacceptable practice.

In 2022 the Charles County Board of Commissioners did the moral and ethical thing to address the lack of accountability that comes with At-Large voting by voting to . change the At-Large voting to District voting in the 2026 election. Due to the lack of accountability among the disenfranchise which caused Charles County to be one of the top counties in Maryland for homelessness due to the lack of affordable housing, portions of the county have been allowed to become barren with food insecurities, lack of economic stimulation, and environmental injustice to name a few. The citizens deserve equal share of the resources and this Bill will address the lack of accountability at the ballot box for all citizens of Maryland and not just those living in the densely population sections of the state.

We urge you and your colleagues to support this bill's passage not just for St. Mary's County, but the state of Maryland as a whole. Thank you again, Chairwoman Atterbeary, for holding this important hearing and for soliciting the NAACP's thoughts, and for your continued leadership in this area.

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