

## Testimony Submitted in Support of House Bill 447

Chair Atterbeary, Vice Chair Wilkins, and Distinguished Members of the Committee:

The method of electing district members to the board of county commissioners through at-large, county-wide voting – currently the practice in just a few of Maryland’s counties – is neither just nor equitable to the citizens in their districts. It discriminates against the electoral power of the very people district membership purports to represent.

The current practice robs people within each commissioner district of their vote on matters of concern within the district. It yields instead to the at-large dominating influence of those who potentially have no concern for those matters, whether of policy, infrastructure, or relief critical to the district. Thus, it effectively suppresses votes within the district, taking away from citizens the very representation that voting in a democracy is intended to ensure, subjecting those votes to gerrymandering without the formality of changing district boundaries.

It is fundamental to democratic elections that the people within a jurisdiction be empowered to elect their representatives free of veto power by those outside that jurisdiction. To deny them this power is to engage arguably in a form of voter suppression by diluting their vote and preventing full representation in violation of Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act.

HB447 will make districts more democratic, giving electoral power where it belongs — to the people who are represented by the person they *and they alone* elect.

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