

FEBRUARY 10, 2023
MARYLAND STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE

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

I am writing in support of House Bill 447 which would require in-district voting for four of the five Commissioners of St. Mary's County.

First and foremost, I believe that in-district voting ensures representation and accountability in local government. Each district has a representative who is accountable to the local community and understands the specific needs and concerns of the constituents.

Opponents say with in-district voting, County Commissioners will ignore the overall good of the County, instead just supporting endeavors of direct benefit to their district. So essentially, being elected by your community means that one is unable to walk and chew gum at the same time. That is ridiculous – it's exactly the same as suggesting that State Delegates are unable to consider the good of the entire State of Maryland, instead only focusing on bringing home the bacon to their Districts.

The demographics of our county, just like many areas, are varied by location. Each location deserves the ability to elect a representative that can represent their needs and their community. In two (of four) districts with the highest concentration of citizens living below the poverty line, the elected officials for these districts were strongest electorally in districts other than those they were supposed to be representing. Thus, the highest concentrations of their votes came from districts other than the one the commissioner candidate was running to represent.

In times past, the demographic make-up of St. Mary's County may well have been evenly spread across the County. But times have changed drastically with the Naval Air Station growth from 1943 to present. That growth has been among the highest in the state. Times have changed everywhere. Only four counties in the state of Maryland still elect all commissioners on a county-wide basis.

I am aware that traditionally, considerable deference is given to the positions of the incumbent commissioners and local delegations on matters such as this – and generally I would respect that tradition. But maintaining at-large voting as the only form of voting is simply outdated and ethically wrong. In most of the counties this bill would affect, the result of the bill would mean that at least some of the commissioner board would be elected by the plurality of the votes in the commissioners' districts. And this is as it should be. Having one or two at-large leaders is appropriate (a commissioner president, for example), but every area should be allowed to have at least one leader who has their best interests in mind because his or her votes count on it.

I implore you. Please support bringing St. Mary's County's elections into the 21st century and vote yes on HB 447. Thank you.

Respectfully submitted,

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