

HB447 Testimony

Good Afternoon Chair Atterbeary, Vice Chair Wilkins, and distinguished members of the committee.

My name is Brandon Russell and I am a resident of St. Mary's County. I come before you to lend my support for HB447. The premise of this bill is simple—voters should have the ability to directly pick their own representation. In fact, this is already true when we elect our State Delegates and Senators, as well as our representatives in Congress. It should be no different for local elections.

Electing our Commissioners by-district would empower voters and improve the process in a few distinct ways.

First, it will make each individual's vote more powerful because they will be voting to directly elect their own Commissioner. Currently, voters from across the county have a say in who is elected in each district, despite these districts having different needs. This prevents voters from holding their elected officials accountable. For example, if the Commissioner from my district isn't properly serving the district they can still be elected by votes from outside of my district removing the opportunity to elect a different candidate. This is not representative government.

Second, voting by-district will level the playing field by creating more opportunity for a wider candidate pool. As a former candidate, I can attest that it is difficult to run county wide. Not only does it make it harder to truly connect with voters, but it also makes the process more expensive. The expense involved in running county-wide can be prohibitive for residents who may consider running for office—especially considering the Commissioner role is billed as "part-time."

Finally, it's nonsensical that our Commissioner Districts are created and redistricted based on population yet the population of any given district has little-to-no ability to influence their own representation.

I ask for a favorable report for HB477. Thank you for your time.

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