

Testimony on HB 565

Government, Labor and Elections Committee

County Boards of Education - Elections - District Voting (Fair Representation Act)

Position: Favorable with Amendments

My name is Julia Nichols, and as a citizen of St. Mary's County, I strongly urge the Committee to pass HB 565 to enact in-district voting for Board of Education races with an amendment that would make voting by district for **all local districted seats** not just Board of Education.

It has never made sense to me that our county is divided into districts, but the entire county votes for all Board of Education members and other districted races. Enacting a law stating that the elected member be elected by a plurality of members in their district ensures that the people in that district will have representation at the table.

At large voting in St. Mary's County (and other counties) does not protect the voices and needs of the minorities in those counties. Enacting this law will ensure that the Board of Education member (and any districted office member) from any given district will be focused on the needs of the constituents in that district, and if that elected member is not serving them well, those constituents will be empowered to vote them out.

I strongly and respectfully urge a favorable vote on HB 565 with an amendment to expand it to all local districted seats.

I also would urge that this become emergency legislation so that it can become effective for 2026 elections. St. Mary's County has been voting at large for far too long, and our voters and citizens deserve better representation.