

Testimony on HB 565 – FAVORABLE
House Committee on Government, Labor and Elections
February 11, 2026

Chair Wells and Vice-Chair Kerr, Elections Subcommittee Chair Fair, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Marcia Greenberg, and I live (and vote) in Lexington Park in St Mary's County. I am submitting testimony **in FAVOR OF HB 565, urging you** to end an archaic system that undermines our right to choose our representation on the Board of Education. The at-large system in St Mary's that controls our ability to elect both our County Commissioners and members of our Board of Education, has been challenged for years. Those who benefit from it have repeatedly done their best to maintain it. While they urge "local courtesy" for themselves, we must urge **local courtesy for us, the people**. The time has come for us, as voters, to make it clear to leadership at both the county and here at the state level: ENOUGH!!

I submit my testimony out of concern for our youth in St Mary's. The quality of the St. Mary's County Public Schools (SMCPS) is certainly important to its students and their families. But it is also important to ALL residents (and taxpayers) who are invested in seeing our schools prepare young people for our economy and civic life of the future. As someone who attended public schools from kindergarten through high school, I believe in the importance of quality public education. In St. Mary's, my commitment to our youth has included a nearly a decade of serving on the NAACP's Education Committee, and of working for a community center that will soon be the first YMCA in the Tri-County Area.

But while the quality of education in St Mary's County has been good, and our Board of Education has included some admirably dedicated members, members of our NAACP Education Committee work as watchdogs and advocates to demand and guide some of the policies that affect local students of color. Our NAACP committee has worked tirelessly to improve diversity

and service for students of color. It took dogged determination to get the schools to ban confederate flags on clothing and backpacks, and to establish clear policies that forbid hate speech. While we have urged the SMCPS to recruit and hire more teachers and senior staff who look like the students in our county, there has been disappointing success, resulting in very few teachers and role models for young students of color. We have repeatedly sought answers about a school-to-prison pipeline, and about the growing achievement gap between white students and students of color. And while we have advocated for programs that would serve all students, such as financial literacy and driver's education, our efforts have met with sluggish responses.

The challenges for us, as a civic group, stem in part from not having robust representation on the Board of Education. And that, in turn, has been impeded by the at-large voting system. One recent example illustrates how the system undermines effective elections and representation: Marsha Williams was a candidate for the Board of Education. She is African American, a full-time lawyer whose practice includes a focus on youth, and a mother of a son in the SMCPS – an absolutely ideal candidate for the Board of Education. We were fortunate that she was willing to run for the Board of Education. But the time, expense and results were affected by an at-large system that requires campaigning countywide: candidates must crisscross a large rural county, and purchase signs to cover a widespread area. In the end, however, here were the results: Marsha Williams WON her race in “her district”, but lost the race countywide by only about 125 votes. What that meant was that a **majority of voters within a district** was **out**-voted by a countywide majority. And to add to that, her district with a large African-American population was outvoted by areas that are significantly more white. **It's that simple -- and that wrong.**

But the results go beyond issues of racial justice - for a candidate and voters and children of color - to ways in which a lack of diversity and quality representation weaken the WHOLE SYSTEM. Without her on the Board of Education, the entire SMCPS lost the benefits of her knowledge and perspective in debates, discussions and decisions.

To make the point, let me offer an analogy:

Imagine a school with 100 students, 55 boys and 45 girls, where students vote school-wide for *all* teachers -- choosing between admired athletes like LeBron James and respected attorneys like Stacey Abrams.

But suppose that while there are more girls in the English and history classes, they hear that all boys are committed to voting only for their sports heroes –for all classes. Though girls excited about Abrams explain that she would be a wonderful teacher, **this** is the predictable outcome:

When votes are cast, all 55 boys vote for athletes – for each and every subject. No matter that girls are the majority in the English and history classes; *schoolwide*, for all classes, the boys' votes prevail. Their 55 votes determine that athletes will teach all students, in all classes. **AND this results in negative impacts for all, because no students benefit from teacher diversity.**

Just as girls who are the majority in a class ought to have the chance to decide their teacher, voters who are the majority within a district ought to be able to choose their own representative on the Board of Education – without being outvoted by cumulative, countywide votes. ***It's simply wrong that one block of county voters determines the outcome in each and every district.*** And just as the boys as well as the girls would have benefited from Abrams as a history teacher, the educators, administrators, students, parents and community would have benefited from someone like Marsha Williams on the Board of Education. ***It simply detracts from quality education when one block of county votes can consistently determine who sits on the Board of Education.***

Distinguished members of this committee: Please recognize that the current system is unfair and undemocratic. Please also recognize that the ONLY way that an entrenched system will change, is if YOU take action. Neither our Commissioners (who are also elected by such an at-

large system), nor a majority in a referendum (who would again be the countywide majority outvoting those who seek in-district representation) will change that. We need for the State of Maryland to ensure democratic systems and fairness. I urge you to issue a **favorable** report on HB 0565.