

**Testimony on HB0565**

County Boards of Education - Elections - District Voting (Fair Representation Act)  
Government, Labor, and Elections Committee

**Position: FAVorable**

*AnnMarie Abell—Chair, St. Mary's County Democratic Central Committee  
PO Box 473 Leonardtown MD 20650*

St. Mary's County uses resident districts to ensure representation is geographically dispersed across the county, yet because of AT-LARGE voting, it woefully falls short of what it means to have true democratic and inclusive representation. My county is STUCK with AT-LARGE, a suppressive voting system that dilutes district voters' voices and choices.

Did you know that a Board of Education member can be elected without having won the majority of their resident district voters? It happened in St. Mary's during the 2022 election. The District 1 Board of Education candidate, **won** their district by 127 votes, yet **AT-LARGE** suppressed District 1's choice.

In practice, the AT-LARGE voting system has the effect of candidates selectively campaigning around the county using a "pick-my-voters" strategy to get the votes of residents in *other* districts. I saw this approach with my own eyes while at the polls. The candidate wins and the district loses because their votes have been diluted and their voices muted. The county as a whole deprives and denies their neighbors true representation.

HB0565 ensures district voters truly have a say in who represents them on their county's Board of Education, champions their interests, and ensures their voices are heard at the BOE's decision making table. If it's good enough for our Legislative and Congressional Districts, it's good enough for our Board of Education Districts.

We request a FAVORABLE Report for HB0565. Thank you.