

Testimony on HB350

Voting Rights Act of 2026 — Counties and Municipal Corporations
Government, Labor, and Elections Committee

Position: FAVorable

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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 Commissioner or 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, a member of a protected class, **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. 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 them true representation.

Later, these AT-LARGE elected officials can willfully ignore the voters in their district while governing, even voting against their district's interests, because after all, they really don't need their district's votes to win. This happened during our YMCA deliberations; and District 4, a majority minority district, where the YMCA will be located, heard "their" district commissioner vote NO more than once. Typically, voters can hold their representative accountable, by voting them out in the next election cycle, **not so with AT-LARGE**. It's made moot by the rest of the county, making it next to impossible to have accountability.

HB 350 ensures district voters truly have a say in who represents them, champions their interests, and ensures their voices are heard at the county's decision making table. If it's good enough for our Legislative and Congressional Districts, it's good enough for our Commissioner and Board of Education Districts.

We request a FAVORABLE Report for HB 350. Thank you.