

**Written Testimony on HB 350 – FAVORABLE  
House Committee on Government, Labor and Elections  
February 11, 2026**

My name is Marcia Greenberg, and I live in Lexington Park in St Mary's County. I am submitting testimony **in support of HB 350, urging you** to establish mechanisms through which longstanding undemocratic systems can be ended. For us in St. Mary's County, we need a way to end at-large voting that dilutes the votes of African-Americans and us, their allies. The system for electing County Commissioners is rigged: Whereas voters in Lexington Park have been able to elect John Bohanan and Brian Crosby for Maryland District 29B, the same voters have been **unable** to elect a Commissioner of their choice – because a block of voters ***out-side*** that area consistently ***out-votes*** us.

My perspective is grounded in my personal experience – constantly seeing my preferred candidate for **County Commissioner lose his or her race** – but also from professional work to increase women's participation in USAID's democracy programs. Professionally, I have seen political systems in Eastern Europe and West Africa that were neither fair nor democratic. I have seen how women were sometimes intentionally but often *de facto* excluded from leadership – and where their needs and perspectives were not represented in decision-making and resource allocation. Personally, I have experienced that in St. Mary's County where all decisions are made by five, white, Republican men. They are not all bad, and some may even listen to their wives and daughters, or consult respectfully with African American constituents. I try to encourage and applaud policies that are good. But decision-making in St Mary's has been weakened and distorted by a lack of **diversity** of perspectives: **no women's perspectives, and no legitimate representation for our community of color.**

It's also important to take an honest look at racial discrimination in our area. In case it's not clear for Delegates from Montgomery and Howard county, I would like to explain or respectfully remind you about life in Southern Maryland. While Maryland is a blue state, it has many areas that are DEEP red. Since moving to St Mary's over twenty years ago, I have been asked frequently by old friends and acquaintances: "Where are you living now?" I always respond: In **southern Maryland**. Why? Because our part of Maryland is the south. It is an area with history and legacies of enslaved people. It has been my honor and pleasure to work with and learn from many in the African American community in St Mary's – including through the NAACP, the Unified Committee for African-American Contributions (UCAC), and Historic Sotterley. Over the years, I have learned about the history of enslavement and racial discrimination in Southern Maryland – and that even as the tobacco buy-out has ended the commercial production of tobacco, the cultural and political ROOTS of tobacco plantations remain. I have seen and heard behaviors and comments and attitudes here that range from hateful and ugly to naively insensitive. To be clear: It's not just history; it is present in 2026.

I am quite certain, therefore, that racial discrimination is a factor in St Mary's politics. What I know about systems that are discriminatory stems from my law school studies: Some discrimination is purposeful, intentionally biased. Perhaps the bias is rooted in the past: There are those who would argue that the at-large system was put in place by those who wanted to prevent the election of African Americans. But it's not all in the past: There are certainly people in St Mary's County today who are driven by such racial discrimination to oppose leadership by a person of color.

But beyond intentional discrimination, there is another type that is not driven by racism or hate: Even when people do not intend to exclude a protected group, and do not consider themselves to be racially biased, there are other ways that a system may function in a way that

discriminates: When the system is neutral in its apparent structure, it may still result in *disparate impacts*. That, in fact, is certainly happening in St. Mary's. While our Commissioners argue that there are benefits to at-large voting, in that all five of the Commissioners are then responsible for looking to the well-being of all residents, the system precludes representation on the Board of County Commissioners by someone who may be a strong advocate for our community of color, and contribute different perspectives. While the at-large system in St Mary's enables the white voters in St Mary's county to outvote people of color, it precludes effective representation for people in a defined district. The system dilutes the vote of a substantial community.

Of course change is hard. Not surprisingly, those who benefit from the current system don't want it changed. Our County Commissioners typically ask Maryland delegates not to support our efforts – by asking for “local courtesy”. But here's the point now, in 2026: We “the people” ask that rather than giving local courtesy to those five Commissioners who are products of the system that we seek to change, that the Maryland General Assembly instead give **local courtesy to us –the people, the voters**. Our message is simple: **ENOUGH!**

Distinguished members of this committee: Please recognize that the current system is unfair and undemocratic. Neither our Commissioners, nor a referendum that would surely be tipped by the same countrywide block, will change that. This measure is long overdue because Maryland must ensure that mechanisms are in place to establish democratic systems and fairness. **Please** issue a **FAVORABLE** report on HB 350.