

HB0565 ORAL Testimony ABELL 11FEB2026.pdf

Uploaded by: AnnMarie Abell

Position: FAV

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.

HB565 Written Testimony CDOv1 (1).pdf

Uploaded by: Cassandra Okwumabua

Position: FAV

February 11, 2026

HB0565, the Fair Representation Act, as a resident of Calvert County

Cassandra Okwumabua, 81 Scarlett Drive, Huntingtown, MD 20639

Position: **Favorable**

House Government, Labor, and Elections, Chair and Members of the Committee:

I appreciate having the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of HB0565, the Fair Representation Act. As a long-time resident of Calvert County, I write to express my strong and unequivocal support for HB 565: Fair Representation Voting, and to respectfully urge a favorable report on this essential legislation.

The 2026 Maryland Voting Rights Act campaign seeks to enact robust protections against voter intimidation, suppression, and discriminatory vote dilution. HB 565 stands as a vital component of that effort. While Maryland is rightfully recognized for having some of the most progressive voting laws in the nation, serious gaps remain in our local election structures that enable voter suppression and discrimination, particularly through at-large voting systems. HB 565 directly addresses this gap by reinforcing the principle of district-based voting for local offices.

The federal Voting Rights Act of 1965 remains our nation's most effective tool for combating discriminatory voting practices. Yet it is only as strong as the states and localities that uphold its spirit and intent. Therefore, Maryland legislators have both the authority and the responsibility to safeguard fair and equitable voting in our local jurisdictions, including Calvert County and similarly situated counties across the state. Currently, under the existing system, I can vote for all seats, even those outside my district. This means that individuals who have never set foot in my neighborhood can effectively decide who represents me. This situation is unacceptable, as it dilutes my district's voice and weakens the connection between elected officials and the people they are meant to serve. This existing way of voting in Calvert County for its County Commissioners and Board of Education is a deeply flawed system.

This structure fundamentally undermines the principle of district representation. It enables voters living outside a district to decide who represents that district, even when their interests and experiences differ significantly from those of the actual residents. This practice is not merely problematic; it is fundamentally inequitable. The opinions of a district's residents can be overridden by voters who do not share their community's concerns or priorities. When a community's preferred candidates are consistently out voted by the broader county electorate, the predictable result is a governing body that fails

to reflect the diversity, priorities, and perspectives of all the people it serves. District-based voting, by contrast, strengthens representation, enhances accountability, and builds genuine trust between elected officials and the residents who depend on them to address local concerns. As a longtime resident, I care deeply about the health of our democracy at the federal, state, and local levels. I want my neighbors and I to have confidence that when we vote for our County Commissioners or Board of Education representative, our voices will not be diluted or overridden by voters residing outside our district. HB 565 offers a straightforward, common-sense remedy to this longstanding problem.

I also want to commend Delegate Long for introducing and championing this legislation. It takes both courage and foresight to challenge entrenched systems that may be familiar but are demonstrably unfair. HB 565 is not about partisan advantage; it is about ensuring that every community in Maryland has a fair opportunity to elect candidates who understand their needs and are directly answerable to them.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge a favorable vote on HB 565: Fair Representation Voting, and to take this critical step toward making our local elections more just, more representative, and more reflective of the values Marylanders hold dear.

Thank you for your time and consideration. And most importantly, your service to the great people of Maryland.

Respectfully submitted,
Cassandra Okwumabua
Calvert County Resident
81 Scarlett Drive
Huntingtown, MD 20639

CCretu Testimony HB565.pdf

Uploaded by: Catherine Cretu

Position: FAV

HB0565 County Boards of Education – Elections – District Voting (Fair Representation Act)

To the attention of the Honorable Government, Labor, and Election Committee.

Today I speak in FAVOR of HB 565. As a parent, grandparent, and 41 year county resident, I have become alarmed by the recent extreme politicization of our school board.

For example, in early 2024 the two Republican members of the BOE joined with 4 Republican County Commissioners to force an external audit of school finances, casting a cloud of suspicion over the then-Democratic majority. When the audit was released—after the election—CCPS was in full compliance with recommendations of the 3 prior state audits. But the damage was done. The \$53,000 audit—in my view a partisan campaign expenditure—was paid for by the taxpayers.

Non-partisan elections are intended to reduce political bias in our schools. However, the Southern Maryland News on November 6, 2024, reported, “In the end, it was all about the team. On Tuesday . . . voters went big for the triumverate of Melissa Goshorn, Joseph Marchio, and Paul Harrison . . .” This slate had the financial backing of a wealthy delegate, along with 4 of the 5 commissioners.

Our Democracy is under attack, even at the very foundational level of our communities—our local schools. HB 565 can help level the playing field by requiring candidates to campaign, and be accountable, to the families of the district they represent, and reduce the ability of one political party to control the outcome of the entire election. HB 565 supports democracy and accountability. Please support it.

Thank you for your time and attention.

Catherine Cretu
Owings, MD

Testimony in Support - February 9, 2026.pdf

Uploaded by: Cindy Yoe

Position: FAV

Officers

Cindy Yoe: Chair
Renita Alexander: Vice Chair
Lauren Elyard: Secretary
Collin Berglund: Treasurer

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB0565
Submitted February 9, 2026

Members

Sylvia Batong
Gabe Gough
Cameron Gross
Greg Howard
Becca Rhodes
David Salazar

Madam Chair and Members of the Government, Labor and
Elections Committee

Associate Members

Garrett Hill
Jennifer Seidel

The Calvert County Democratic Central Committee submits this testimony in support of HB0565, the Fair Representation Act. This legislation addresses a structural issue in the way members of the Calvert County Board of Education are elected and would improve fairness, accountability, and representative governance.

Currently, the Calvert County Board of Education consists of five elected members: three designated to represent the county’s three commissioner districts and two elected at large. However, all five members are elected by voters countywide, regardless of district designation. As a result, the current system does not provide meaningful district-based representation and instead dilutes the distinct perspectives, needs, and concerns of different areas of the county.

Countywide, at-large voting diminishes the ability of voters in specific communities to elect representatives who reflect their local priorities. This impact is particularly significant in counties where demographic diversity is concentrated geographically. According to the 2024 Census, Calvert County’s population is approximately 78.6 percent white, with much of its racial and ethnic diversity concentrated in communities such as Prince Frederick, Lusby, and Chesapeake Beach. Under the current at-large system, voters in these areas have their collective voices diluted when their votes are combined with those of the entire county.

Historically, at-large election systems have been used in many jurisdictions to weaken the electoral influence of minority voters. While circumstances and motivations may differ today, the structural effect remains -- at-large voting reduces accountability to specific communities and can result in the underrepresentation of marginalized populations. When elected officials are not required to secure support from the district they intend to represent, there is less incentive to address district-specific concerns.

HB0565 provides a balanced and practical solution. Under this legislation, Calvert County would retain two at-large members to represent countywide interests, while the three district-based members would be elected solely by voters within their respective districts.

Testimony in Support of HB0565
Submitted February 9, 2026
Page 2

This approach preserves a countywide perspective while ensuring that each district has direct, accountable representation that reflects its unique demographics, priorities, and needs.

Fair and representative electoral systems are essential to public trust and effective governance. As we look toward the future, particularly in an area as critical as public education, it is imperative that Boards of Education reflect the communities they serve. Ensuring equitable representation strengthens decision-making and helps guarantee that students, families, and educators across all areas of the county have a meaningful voice.

For these reasons, the Calvert County Democratic Central Committee strongly supports the passage of HB0565.

Respectfully submitted,



Cindy L. Yoe, Chair

HB565 Reprint with Sponsor Amendment 1

Uploaded by: Jeffrie Long

Position: FAV

HOUSE BILL 565

F3, G1

6lr2339

By: **Delegate J. Long**

Introduced and read first time: January 28, 2026

Assigned to: Government, Labor, and Elections

A BILL ENTITLED

1 AN ACT concerning

2 ~~County Boards of Education – Elections – District Voting~~
3 ~~(Fair Representation Act)~~ Education – County Boards of Education – Elections and Antiracism
4 Policy

4 FOR the purpose of requiring each county board of education to adopt a certain antiracism
5 policy and review the policy at certain intervals; requiring each county superintendent to
6 develop certain procedures to implement the antiracism policy; authorizing a county board of
7 education to amend a certain antiracism policy; requiring an election of members of certain
8 county boards of education
9 to represent a specific district to be decided by a plurality of the votes cast within
10 that district; and generally relating to county boards of education elections and
11 antiracism policies.

BY adding to

Article - Education

Section 3-106

Annotated Code of Maryland

(2025 Replacement Volume and 2025 Supplement)

7 BY repealing and reenacting, without amendments,

8 Article – Education

9 Section 3-301(a), 3-4A-01(a), 3-601(b), 3-901(b), 3-10A-01(a) and (c)(1), and

10 3-1101(e)(1)

11 Annotated Code of Maryland

12 (2025 Replacement Volume and 2025 Supplement)

13 BY repealing and reenacting, with amendments,

14 Article – Education

15 Section 3-301(d), 3-4A-01(b), 3-601(d)(1), 3-901(f)(2), 3-10A-01(b), and

16 3-1101(e)(2)

17 Annotated Code of Maryland

18 (2025 Replacement Volume and 2025 Supplement)

19 SECTION 1. BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF MARYLAND,

20 That the Laws of Maryland read as follows:

21 **Article – Education**

3-106.

(A) (1) IN THIS SECTION THE FOLLOWING WORDS HAVE THE MEANINGS INDICATED.

(2) “ANTIRACISM” MEANS THE PRACTICE OF IDENTIFYING, CHALLENGING, AND
CHANGING THE VALUES, STRUCTURES, AND BEHAVIORS THAT PERPETUATE SYSTEMIC RACISM.

(3) “ETHNICITY” MEANS A PERSON’S IDENTIFICATION WITH A GROUP BASED ON
CHARACTERISTICS SUCH AS SHARED HISTORY, ANCESTRY, GEOGRAPHIC AND LANGUAGE ORIGIN,
AND CULTURE.

(4) (i) “INDIVIDUAL RACISM” MEANS PREJUDGMENT, BIAS, OR
DISCRIMINATION BY AN INDIVIDUAL BASED ON RACE.

(II) "INDIVIDUAL RACISM" INCLUDES PRIVATELY HELD ATTITUDES AND BELIEFS, CONSCIOUS AND UNCONSCIOUS, AND EXTERNAL BEHAVIORS, AND ACTIONS TOWARDS OTHERS.

(5) "INSTITUTIONAL RACISM" MEANS RACISM WITHIN INSTITUTIONS AND ORGANIZATIONS, SUCH AS SCHOOLS, HEALTH CARE, AND JUDICIAL SYSTEMS, THAT ADOPT AND MAINTAIN POLICIES, PRACTICES, AND PROCEDURES THAT OFTEN UNINTENTIONALLY PRODUCE INEQUITABLE OUTCOMES FOR PEOPLE OF COLOR AND ADVANTAGES FOR WHITE PEOPLE.

(6) "OPPORTUNITY GAP" MEANS THE WAYS SYSTEMIC STRUCTURES, PRACTICES, AND ALLOCATION OF RESOURCES CREATES REDUCED OR DENIED OPPORTUNITIES, GENERALLY BY RACE, ETHNICITY, SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS, ENGLISH PROFICIENCY, COMMUNITY WEALTH, FAMILIAL SITUATIONS, OR OTHER FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO OR PERPETUATE LOWER EDUCATIONAL RIGOR, PARTICIPATION, AND ACHIEVEMENT FOR CERTAIN GROUPS OF STUDENTS.

(7) "PRIVILEGE" MEANS THE WEB OF INSTITUTIONAL AND CULTURAL TREATMENT THAT AFFORDS WHITE PEOPLE GREATER ACCESS TO POWER AND RESOURCES THAN PEOPLE OF COLOR IN THE SAME SITUATION.

(8) "RACISM" MEANS THE SYSTEM OF STRUCTURING OPPORTUNITY AND ASSIGNING VALUE BASED ON THE SOCIAL INTERPRETATION OF HOW ONE LOOKS THAT UNFAIRLY DISADVANTAGES SOME INDIVIDUALS AND COMMUNITIES OR UNFAIRLY ADVANTAGES OTHER INDIVIDUALS AND COMMUNITIES.

(9) (I) "SYSTEMIC RACISM" MEANS THE HISTORY AND CURRENT REALITY OF INSTITUTIONAL RACISM ACROSS ALL INSTITUTIONS AND SOCIETY.

(II) "SYSTEMIC RACISM" INCLUDES THE HISTORY, CULTURE, IDEOLOGY, AND INTERACTIONS OF INSTITUTIONS AND POLICIES THAT PERPETUATE A SYSTEM OF INEQUITY THAT IS DETRIMENTAL TO COMMUNITIES OF COLOR.

(B) A COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION SHALL ADOPT THE FOLLOWING POLICY STATEMENT:

"THE (NAME OF COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION) BELIEVES THAT COMBATING THE INDIVIDUAL RACISM AND INSTITUTIONAL RACISM THAT CONTINUES TO EXIST IN OUR SCHOOLS IS A LEGAL AND MORAL OBLIGATION.

THE (NAME OF COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION) AFFIRMS AN OBLIGATION TO REQUIRE A SAFE, ANTIRACIST, AND INCLUSIVE EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT WHERE EACH STUDENT AND STAFF MEMBER IS TREATED WITH RESPECT AND DIGNITY, REGARDLESS OF RACE OR ETHNICITY. AS SUCH, THE BOARD OF EDUCATION WILL NOT TOLERATE THE VALUES, STRUCTURES, AND BEHAVIORS THAT PERPETUATE SYSTEMIC RACISM. THE (NAME OF COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION) WILL ADOPT AND MAINTAIN POLICIES, PRACTICES, AND PROCEDURES THAT PRODUCE EQUITABLE OUTCOMES FOR STUDENTS OF COLOR AND MARGINALIZED GROUPS AND ENCOURAGE ANTIRACISM.

THE (NAME OF COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION) BELIEVES ALL EMPLOYEES PLAY A VITAL ROLE IN REDUCING RACISM AND INEQUITY BY RECOGNIZING THE MANIFESTATIONS OF RACISM, CREATING CULTURALLY INCLUSIVE LEARNING, AND WORKING ENVIRONMENTS, AND DISMANTLING EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS THAT DIRECTLY OR INDIRECTLY PERPETUATE RACISM AND PRIVILEGE.

THE (NAME OF COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION) BELIEVES THAT ALL STUDENTS CAN LEARN WHEN OPPORTUNITY GAPS ARE ELIMINATED. INDIVIDUAL AND INSTITUTIONAL RACISM CREATES OPPORTUNITY GAPS. THE (NAME OF COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION) RECOGNIZES THAT OPPORTUNITY GAPS HAVE SIGNIFICANT INTERGENERATIONAL EFFECTS AND PERPETUATE ECONOMIC, SOCIAL, AND EDUCATIONAL INEQUITY. RACIAL INEQUITIES WERE CREATED OVER TIME AND MUST BE ELIMINATED WHEN IDENTIFIED. INDIVIDUAL RACISM IS A LEARNED BEHAVIOR THAT WILL NOT BE TOLERATED WITHIN THE (NAME OF COUNTY) SCHOOL SYSTEM."

(C) EACH COUNTY SUPERINTENDENT SHALL:

(1) DEVELOP ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURES TO IMPLEMENT THE POLICY REQUIRED UNDER THIS SECTION IN ACCORDANCE WITH ALL LOCAL POLICIES AND LOCAL, STATE AND,

FEDERAL LAWS AND REGULATIONS; AND

(2) COMMUNICATE THE POLICY AND ACCOMPANYING PROCEDURES TO ALL STAFF OF THE LOCAL SCHOOL SYSTEM INCLUDING TEACHERS, SUPPORT STAFF, AND ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF.

(D) (1) SUBJECT TO PARAGRAPH (2) OF THIS SUBSECTION, BEGINNING IN THE 2029-2030 SCHOOL YEAR AND EVERY 3 SCHOOL YEARS THEREAFTER, EACH COUNTY BOARD SHALL REVIEW THE POLICY REQUIRED UNDER THIS SECTION AT THE END OF THE SCHOOL YEAR.

(2) (i) A COUNTY BOARD, BY MAJORITY VOTE IN PUBLIC SESSION, MAY AMEND THE POLICY REQUIRED UNDER THIS SECTION.

(ii) AN AMENDMENT TO A POLICY UNDER SUBPARAGRAPH (i) OF THIS PARAGRAPH MAY NOT RELIEVE THE COUNTY BOARD OF THE BOARD'S OBLIGATION TO COMPLY WITH THE RELEVANT LOCAL, STATE, AND FEDERAL LAWS AND REGULATIONS, OR THE RULES AND REGULATIONS OF THE STATE BOARD AND THE DEPARTMENT.

22 3-301.

23 (a) The Calvert County Board consists of five voting members and one nonvoting
24 student member.

2 **REPRINT OF HOUSE BILL 565 as amended by HB0565/903325/1 02/09/26 at 10:04 AM**

1 (d) Of the five voting members of the county board:

2 (1) One shall be elected from each of the three county commissioner
3 districts **BY A PLURALITY OF THE VOTES CAST WITHIN THAT DISTRICT**; and

4 (2) Two shall be elected from the county at large.

5 3-4A-01.

6 (a) The Cecil County Board consists of six members as follows:

7 (1) One voting member elected from each of the five commissioner districts;
8 and

9 (2) One nonvoting student member.

10 (b) The five voting members of the county board shall be elected **[at]:**

11 **(1) AT a general election as required by subsection (c) of this section; AND**

12 **(2) BY A PLURALITY OF THE VOTES CAST WITHIN EACH RESPECTIVE**
13 **COMMISSIONER DISTRICT.**

14 3-601.

15 (b) The Garrett County Board consists of:

16 (1) One elected member from each county commissioner district;

17 (2) Two elected members from the county at large; and

18 (3) One nonvoting student member.

19 (d) (1) Elected members of the board shall be elected **[at]:**

20 **(I) AT a general election as required by subsection (e) of this section;**
21 **AND**

22 **(II) FOR THE MEMBERS ELECTED FROM EACH COUNTY**
23 **COMMISSIONER DISTRICT, BY A PLURALITY OF THE VOTES CAST WITHIN THAT**
24 **COMMISSIONER DISTRICT.**

25 3-901.

26 (b) The Montgomery County Board consists of:

3 REPRINT OF HOUSE BILL 565 as amended by HB0565/903325/1 02/09/26 at 10:04 AM

1 (1) 5 elected members, each of whom resides in a different board of
2 education district;

3 (2) 2 elected members who may reside anywhere in the county; and

4 (3) 1 student member.

5 (f) (2) (I) [Elected] **THE ELECTED** members of the county board **WHO**
6 **MAY RESIDE ANYWHERE IN THE COUNTY** shall be elected by the voters of the entire
7 county.

8 (II) **THE ELECTED MEMBERS FROM EACH OF THE BOARD OF**
9 **EDUCATION DISTRICTS SHALL BE ELECTED BY A PLURALITY OF THE VOTES CAST**
10 **WITHIN THAT BOARD OF EDUCATION DISTRICT.**

11 3-10A-01.

12 (a) The Queen Anne's County Board consists of:

13 (1) Five voting, nonpartisan, elected members; and

14 (2) One nonvoting student representative from each public high school in
15 the county.

16 (b) The five voting, nonpartisan, elected members shall be elected [by the voters
17 of the entire county] at a general election in accordance with subsection (c) of this section
18 **AS FOLLOWS:**

19 (1) **FOR THE MEMBER ELECTED FROM THE COUNTY AT LARGE, BY**
20 **THE VOTERS OF THE ENTIRE COUNTY; AND**

21 (2) **FOR THE MEMBERS ELECTED FROM EACH OF THE FOUR COUNTY**
22 **COMMISSIONER DISTRICTS, BY A PLURALITY OF THE VOTES CAST WITHIN THAT**
23 **DISTRICT.**

24 (c) (1) (i) One voting member shall reside in and be elected from each of
25 the four county commissioner districts; and

26 (ii) One member shall reside in the county and be elected from the
27 county at large.

28 3-1101.

29 (e) (1) The St. Mary's County Board consists of five voting members who shall
30 be elected as follows:

4 REPRINT OF HOUSE BILL 565 as amended by HB0565/903325/1 02/09/26 at 10:04 AM

1 (i) One member shall be elected from the county at large; and

2 (ii) One member shall be elected from each of the four commissioner
3 districts.

4 (2) Voting members of the county board shall be elected:

5 (i) At a general election as required by this section; and

6 (ii) **1. [On] FOR THE MEMBER ELECTED FROM THE COUNTY**
7 **AT LARGE, ON a general countywide ticket; AND**

8 **2. FOR THE MEMBERS ELECTED FROM EACH OF THE**
9 **FOUR COMMISSIONER DISTRICTS, BY A PLURALITY OF THE VOTES CAST WITHIN**
10 **THAT DISTRICT.**

11 SECTION 2. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, That this Act:

12 (1) shall be applicable to the elections for county boards of education in
13 which members are elected from individual districts held in 2028 and all subsequent
14 elections; and

15 (2) may not be construed to affect the tenure of an elected member of a
16 county board of education who is elected from an individual district serving in office before
17 the beginning of the next regular full term of office that begins after the effective date of
18 this Act.

19 SECTION 3. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, That this Act shall take effect
20 October 1, 2026.

HB565 Sponsor Amendment 1

Uploaded by: Jeffrie Long

Position: FAV



HB0565/903325/1

AMENDMENTS PREPARED BY THE DEPT. OF LEGISLATIVE SERVICES 09 FEB 26 10:04:40

BY: Delegate J. Long
(To be offered in the Government, Labor, and Elections
Committee)

AMENDMENTS TO HOUSE BILL 565
(First Reading File Bill)

AMENDMENT NO. 1

On page 1, strike in their entirety lines 2 and 3 and substitute “**Education – County Boards of Education – Elections and Antiracism Policy**”; in line 4, after the first “of” insert “requiring each county board of education to adopt a certain antiracism policy and review the policy at certain intervals; requiring each county superintendent to develop certain procedures to implement the antiracism policy; authorizing a county board of education to amend a certain antiracism policy;”; in line 6, after “elections” insert “and antiracism policies”; and after line 6, insert:

“BY adding to

Article - Education

Section 3–106

Annotated Code of Maryland

(2025 Replacement Volume and 2025 Supplement)”.

AMENDMENT NO. 2

On page 1, after line 21, insert:

“**3–106.**

(A) (1) IN THIS SECTION THE FOLLOWING WORDS HAVE THE MEANINGS INDICATED.

(2) “ANTIRACISM” MEANS THE PRACTICE OF IDENTIFYING, CHALLENGING, AND CHANGING THE VALUES, STRUCTURES, AND BEHAVIORS THAT PERPETUATE SYSTEMIC RACISM.

(3) “ETHNICITY” MEANS A PERSON’S IDENTIFICATION WITH A GROUP BASED ON CHARACTERISTICS SUCH AS SHARED HISTORY, ANCESTRY, GEOGRAPHIC AND LANGUAGE ORIGIN, AND CULTURE.

(4) (I) “INDIVIDUAL RACISM” MEANS PREJUDGMENT, BIAS, OR DISCRIMINATION BY AN INDIVIDUAL BASED ON RACE.

(II) “INDIVIDUAL RACISM” INCLUDES PRIVATELY HELD ATTITUDES AND BELIEFS, CONSCIOUS AND UNCONSCIOUS, AND EXTERNAL BEHAVIORS, AND ACTIONS TOWARDS OTHERS.

(5) “INSTITUTIONAL RACISM” MEANS RACISM WITHIN INSTITUTIONS AND ORGANIZATIONS, SUCH AS SCHOOLS, HEALTH CARE, AND JUDICIAL SYSTEMS, THAT ADOPT AND MAINTAIN POLICIES, PRACTICES, AND PROCEDURES THAT OFTEN UNINTENTIONALLY PRODUCE INEQUITABLE OUTCOMES FOR PEOPLE OF COLOR AND ADVANTAGES FOR WHITE PEOPLE.

(6) “OPPORTUNITY GAP” MEANS THE WAYS SYSTEMIC STRUCTURES, PRACTICES, AND ALLOCATION OF RESOURCES CREATES REDUCED OR DENIED OPPORTUNITIES, GENERALLY BY RACE, ETHNICITY, SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS, ENGLISH PROFICIENCY, COMMUNITY WEALTH, FAMILIAL SITUATIONS, OR OTHER FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO OR PERPETUATE LOWER EDUCATIONAL RIGOR, PARTICIPATION, AND ACHIEVEMENT FOR CERTAIN GROUPS OF STUDENTS.

(7) “PRIVILEGE” MEANS THE WEB OF INSTITUTIONAL AND CULTURAL TREATMENT THAT AFFORDS WHITE PEOPLE GREATER ACCESS TO POWER AND RESOURCES THAN PEOPLE OF COLOR IN THE SAME SITUATION.

(8) “RACISM” MEANS THE SYSTEM OF STRUCTURING OPPORTUNITY AND ASSIGNING VALUE BASED ON THE SOCIAL INTERPRETATION OF HOW ONE LOOKS THAT UNFAIRLY DISADVANTAGES SOME INDIVIDUALS AND COMMUNITIES OR UNFAIRLY ADVANTAGES OTHER INDIVIDUALS AND COMMUNITIES.

(9) (I) “SYSTEMIC RACISM” MEANS THE HISTORY AND CURRENT REALITY OF INSTITUTIONAL RACISM ACROSS ALL INSTITUTIONS AND SOCIETY.

(II) “SYSTEMIC RACISM” INCLUDES THE HISTORY, CULTURE, IDEOLOGY, AND INTERACTIONS OF INSTITUTIONS AND POLICIES THAT PERPETUATE A SYSTEM OF INEQUITY THAT IS DETRIMENTAL TO COMMUNITIES OF COLOR.

(B) A COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION SHALL ADOPT THE FOLLOWING POLICY STATEMENT:

“THE (NAME OF COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION) BELIEVES THAT COMBATING THE INDIVIDUAL RACISM AND INSTITUTIONAL RACISM THAT CONTINUES TO EXIST IN OUR SCHOOLS IS A LEGAL AND MORAL OBLIGATION.

THE (NAME OF COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION) AFFIRMS AN OBLIGATION TO REQUIRE A SAFE, ANTIRACIST, AND INCLUSIVE EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT WHERE EACH STUDENT AND STAFF MEMBER IS TREATED WITH

(Over)

RESPECT AND DIGNITY, REGARDLESS OF RACE OR ETHNICITY. AS SUCH, THE BOARD OF EDUCATION WILL NOT TOLERATE THE VALUES, STRUCTURES, AND BEHAVIORS THAT PERPETUATE SYSTEMIC RACISM. THE (NAME OF COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION) WILL ADOPT AND MAINTAIN POLICIES, PRACTICES, AND PROCEDURES THAT PRODUCE EQUITABLE OUTCOMES FOR STUDENTS OF COLOR AND MARGINALIZED GROUPS AND ENCOURAGE ANTIRACISM.

THE (NAME OF COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION) BELIEVES ALL EMPLOYEES PLAY A VITAL ROLE IN REDUCING RACISM AND INEQUITY BY RECOGNIZING THE MANIFESTATIONS OF RACISM, CREATING CULTURALLY INCLUSIVE LEARNING, AND WORKING ENVIRONMENTS, AND DISMANTLING EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS THAT DIRECTLY OR INDIRECTLY PERPETUATE RACISM AND PRIVILEGE.

THE (NAME OF COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION) BELIEVES THAT ALL STUDENTS CAN LEARN WHEN OPPORTUNITY GAPS ARE ELIMINATED. INDIVIDUAL AND INSTITUTIONAL RACISM CREATES OPPORTUNITY GAPS. THE (NAME OF COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION) RECOGNIZES THAT OPPORTUNITY GAPS HAVE SIGNIFICANT INTERGENERATIONAL EFFECTS AND PERPETUATE ECONOMIC, SOCIAL, AND EDUCATIONAL INEQUITY. RACIAL INEQUITIES WERE CREATED OVER TIME AND MUST BE ELIMINATED WHEN IDENTIFIED. INDIVIDUAL RACISM IS A LEARNED BEHAVIOR THAT WILL NOT BE TOLERATED WITHIN THE (NAME OF COUNTY) SCHOOL SYSTEM.”.

(C) EACH COUNTY SUPERINTENDENT SHALL:

(1) DEVELOP ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURES TO IMPLEMENT THE POLICY REQUIRED UNDER THIS SECTION IN ACCORDANCE WITH ALL LOCAL POLICIES AND LOCAL, STATE AND, FEDERAL LAWS AND REGULATIONS; AND

(2) COMMUNICATE THE POLICY AND ACCOMPANYING PROCEDURES TO ALL STAFF OF THE LOCAL SCHOOL SYSTEM INCLUDING TEACHERS, SUPPORT STAFF, AND ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF.

(D) (1) SUBJECT TO PARAGRAPH (2) OF THIS SUBSECTION, BEGINNING IN THE 2029–2030 SCHOOL YEAR AND EVERY 3 SCHOOL YEARS THEREAFTER, EACH COUNTY BOARD SHALL REVIEW THE POLICY REQUIRED UNDER THIS SECTION AT THE END OF THE SCHOOL YEAR.

(2) (I) A COUNTY BOARD, BY MAJORITY VOTE IN PUBLIC SESSION, MAY AMEND THE POLICY REQUIRED UNDER THIS SECTION.

(II) AN AMENDMENT TO A POLICY UNDER SUBPARAGRAPH (I) OF THIS PARAGRAPH MAY NOT RELIEVE THE COUNTY BOARD OF THE BOARD'S OBLIGATION TO COMPLY WITH THE RELEVANT LOCAL, STATE, AND FEDERAL LAWS AND REGULATIONS, OR THE RULES AND REGULATIONS OF THE STATE BOARD AND THE DEPARTMENT."

HB565- County Boards of Education – Elections – Di

Uploaded by: Jeffrie Long

Position: FAV



THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

February 11, 2026

Madam Chair, Mister Vice Chair, and Members of the Government, Labor, and Elections Committee,

House Bill 0565, *County Boards of Education – Elections – District Voting (Fair Representation Act)*, ensures that members elected to represent specific school board districts are chosen by the voters who reside in those districts. This legislation promotes fair representation, strengthens local accountability, and aligns school board elections with core democratic principles already in practice across Maryland.

As the Committee considers this bill, it is important to recognize how at-large voting structures can dilute district voices and weaken accountability. When candidates designated to represent specific geographic districts are elected countywide, communities may find that their localized educational needs and priorities are overshadowed by broader countywide interests.

The Fair Representation Act addresses this concern by requiring that district-based board members be elected by a plurality of votes cast within their respective districts. This approach ensures voters directly select the individuals responsible for representing their schools and neighborhoods, while preserving existing at-large seats where applicable. The bill does not restructure school boards, alter term lengths, or impose new mandates on counties. It simply clarifies the electorate for district-specific seats.

Many Maryland jurisdictions already use district-based voting for boards of education. HB565 brings additional counties into alignment with these established practices, promoting consistency, fairness, and clarity across the State's education governance framework. Rather than creating a new model, the bill builds on proven approaches already functioning successfully in Maryland.

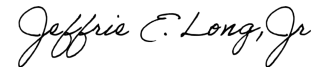
District-based voting enhances responsiveness and trust. Parents, educators, and community members benefit when their representative is directly accountable to the voters they serve. This structure encourages engagement, transparency, and confidence in school board decision-making.

Importantly, HB0565 does not disrupt the tenure of current board members. It applies prospectively and takes effect beginning with the 2028 election cycle, providing ample time for election administrators and local governments to prepare for implementation.

At its core, this legislation affirms a simple principle: representation should reflect the will of the voters most directly affected by local education decisions. By ensuring district representatives are elected by district voters, HB0565 advances fairness, accountability, and public trust in Maryland's education system.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to issue a favorable report on House Bill 0565. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Very Truly Yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jeffrie E. Long, Jr.".

Delegate Jeffrie E. Long, Jr.

HB0565 Favorable.pdf

Uploaded by: Joseph Cormier

Position: FAV

Joseph Cormier
9201 Sam Owings Pl
Owings MD 20735

House Bill 0565 County Boards of Education – Elections – District Voting 2 (Fair Representation Act)

Greetings Delegate J. Long and Honorable Members,

I speak today in **FAVOR** of HB0565. As a Parent, special education advocate, and CAESS union member I believe the students, families, staff and community as a whole would be better represented by this act. Currently, those seeking a seat on the Board of Education must live within a district, but beyond that they have no motivation to serve that district. One must only look at the last election cycle for proof of this. The representatives for District 1 and District 2 and District 3, for what have historically been independent and non-partisan roles, declared themselves as a group under the umbrella of the Republican party. The D1 and D2 candidates raised little money and held no events on their own, rather tying themselves to the D3 candidate's fundraising and campaigning. Instead of representing their districts, they have instead voted as a block to enact anti-LGBTQ policies, remove protections for minority groups, dismantled the Anti-Racism policies and demeaned staff and students. It is my belief that if the candidate for a district seat was elected by the constituents of their district, they would have to campaign in those districts, listen to their constituents and ultimately be held accountable in a fair representation. I ask this assembly to please vote in favor of HB0565 and give the power back to the people of Calvert County.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

In Solidarity,

Joseph Cormier

HB 565 Testimony .pdf

Uploaded by: Kurt Engel

Position: FAV

Testimony from
Kurt Engel
to Support Passage of
Fair Representation Act (HB 565)

I am writing to encourage passage of the Fair Representation Act. As a resident of St Mary's County, I have seen first-hand what happens when voting at large dilutes the vote. Like a small minority of the counties in Maryland, all members of the St Mary's County Board of Education are elected by the county at large. The issue for St Mary's is that the demographics of the four individual districts that make up the county are very different. With at large voting, the vote of the individual districts is diluted, and they are not able to elect fair representation to represent their district members. District based voting should be implemented for all county Boards of Education.

Please pass the Fair Representation Act.

Greenberg HB 565 Testimony FAV 2-11-26.pdf

Uploaded by: Marcia Greenberg

Position: FAV

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.

Written Testimony for HB565.pdf

Uploaded by: Miriam Klapka

Position: FAV

TESTIMONY FOR HB565

HB 565 County Boards of Education – Elections – District Voting (Fair Representation Act) Presented to the Government, Labor and Elections Committee

February 9, 2026

FAVORABLE

Dear Chair Wells, Vice Chair Kerr, and members of the Government, Labor and Elections Committee,

My name is Miriam Klapka. I live in St. Mary's County. I am writing in support of HB565.

To my knowledge, this is the 4th attempt to get this bill passed in nearly as many years:

- 2021: HB655. Included both County Commissioners and Board of Education
- 2023: HB447. County Commissioners only
- 2025: HB391. Board of Education only

St. Mary's County is comprised of four commissioner districts. The Board of Education districts are aligned with the commissioner districts. The Boards, Education and County Commissioners, are each comprised of five members, one from each district and one who runs at-large.

Each of the four districts has unique character; likewise, the voters in each district can differ in significant characteristics, i.e. race, culture, religion, income, profession, etc. In addition to demographics, the four districts differ politically. Districts 1 and 2 have a plurality of Republican voters. District 3 has a majority of Republican voters. And District 4 has a plurality of Democratic voters.

There is no fair argument for a 20,000-voter district board member to be elected by 90,000 county voters. Each district's voters should be able to elect a board member who represents their interests and values, and also have the ability to remove board members who fail to support district priorities. At-large voting negates the different values and priorities of the districts.

A couple of examples demonstrate the consequences of at-large voting. Although I use examples that refer to the County Commissioners rather than the Board of Education, the principles are the same: at-large voting results in communities unable to get a seat at the table and unable to hold their at-large-elected representative accountable.

2012: The number of Republican registered voters surpassed the number of Democratic registered voters in the county. Since then, in three elections, 2014, 2018, 2022, only Republicans have been elected to the Board of County Commissioners. The three elections prior to 2012 were bipartisan.

2021: By a vote of 5-0, the commissioners opposed HB745 that increased the number of Early Vote Centers (EVC) in St. Mary's County from 1 to 2. Their letter stated: "We do not believe this legislation would benefit the citizens of St. Mary's County." Increased voter access benefits all voters. The Board's opposition was not questioned.

2021: The county's code for the Redistricting Board states the board "shall be composed of one appointee made by each member of the Board of County Commissioners." At the time, voter registration for the county was approximately 26000 registered Democrats, 31000 registered Republicans, and 17000 registered as Unaffiliated. Despite community calls for a bipartisan board, the Commissioners appointed five Republicans to the five-member Redistricting Board.

2022: In the General Election, a Board of Education candidate for District 1 received more votes from District 1 voters than her opponent. In a district voting system, she would have won the election. But she lost the election due to at-large voting.

My vote for my district board member cannot carry its proportional weight within my district; rather it shrinks under the aggregate weight of the entire county.

The time has come to abolish at-large voting.

I end with mentioning the biggest advantage, in my opinion, of district voting. District voting defines and strengthens accountability of elected board members.

I urge a favorable report on HB565.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

2-11-26 HB 565 County Boards of Education - Electi

Uploaded by: Nancy Soreng

Position: FAV



TESTIMONY TO THE GOVERNMENT, LABOR AND ELECTIONS COMMITTEE

HB 565 County Boards of Education - Elections - District Voting (Fair Representation Act)

Position: Favorable

By: Linda T. Kohn, President

Date: February 11, 2026

The League of Women Voters supports districting standards that not only protect the right of all citizens to vote but also encourage all citizens to vote. To that end, we support standards that promote fair and effective representation at all levels of government with maximum opportunity for public participation.

As the law currently stands, six Maryland counties are divided into Board of Education election districts: Calvert, Cecil, Garrett, Montgomery, Queen Anne's, and St. Mary's County - yet the members of those districts are voted on by all county voters. This can, and has, resulted in voters being represented by Board of Education members who were elected by a minority of voters from their particular district. This is unfair and ineffective representation and discourages voter engagement both in the voting process and with their representative on the School Board.

This legislation still allows for some Board members to continue to be elected at-large, meaning that they can be elected by all voters in the county. But it also requires that members elected to represent districts be elected with a plurality of votes cast by those who live in that district. For those counties that require the candidate to live in the district they are running to represent them, this maintains that requirement. This was not specified in the bill for all the impacted counties and might be something to consider.

We are all aware of apathy on the part of many voters because they believe their vote will not matter, which can be true if the votes of people who don't live in that district overwhelm the votes of those who actually live there. Therefore, we strongly support HB 566 and urge a favorable report.

AMD Written testimony 2026 HB 565.pdf

Uploaded by: Anne Marie Dailey

Position: FWA

February 9, 2026

HB 565 County Boards of Education – Elections – District Voting

Government, Labor and Elections Committee

Position: Favorable with Amendments

Esteemed members of the House Government, Labor and Elections Committee,

I am writing in support of HB 565, County Boards of Education – Elections – District Voting.

The area of my concern lies in the practice across several counties in the Southern Maryland region of at-large (county-wide) voting for district seats. In St Mary's County, where I live and raise my family, the elected offices of the school board and county commissioners are all voted on at-large even though there are four districts in which the candidates must live. This is vote dilution pure and simple. Voters should have the ability to directly pick their own representation. In St. Mary's County in particular, there are definitely one and maybe two districts that would likely elect a different candidate if only the votes from that district counted. These two districts have a much higher percentage of people of color and of poverty than the county as a whole. With this practice, potential candidates are discouraged from running because they don't think they can win, and this has been proven out with election results. It also discourages voting since voters feel their candidate doesn't have a chance anyway or isn't even on the ballot. Ending the practice of at-large voting for districted offices would be an important step towards fair representation for protected classes.

Therefore, my encouragement to the committee is to amend and improve HB 565 by making school board as well as county commissioner races by district.

Thank you for all you do.

Sincerely,

Anne Marie Dailey

California, MD (St. Mary's County)

703-517-1978

daileyam@gmail.com

HB565 Testimony.pdf

Uploaded by: Brandon Russell

Position: FWA

Chair Wells, Vice Chair Kerr, and Distinguished Members of the Committee,

My name is Brandon Russell, and I am a resident of Maryland. I am writing in support of HB565, and **urge a favorable, with amendments report on this bill.**

I propose **amending** this bill to include language requiring counties, like St. Mary's, where all members of the Board of County Commissioners are elected at-large to instead elect Commissioners by a plurality of votes in each Commissioner district.

In St. Mary's, four members each of the Board of Education and the Board of County Commissioners must run in a district, while the fifth member runs at-large. However, all five elected positions for each board are voted on at-large. The existence of districts suggests that voters within those districts choose their own representative, but in practice they do not. This system is confusing, misleading, and creates an unnecessary barrier to voter understanding and engagement.

At-large voting also restricts the ability of constituents to hold their elected officials accountable. Voters in rural District A may prioritize issues like infrastructure, while voters in a more urban and populous District B may have very different concerns. When all votes are cast countywide, the priorities of larger districts can consistently override those of smaller or more rural communities, even when those communities are electing "their" district representative.

Moreover, at-large voting discourages a diverse and representative candidate pool by diluting the voting power of specific communities and groups with shared interests. Our democracy functions best when everyone has a meaningful voice. Women, African American, LGBTQIA+, and other minority candidates have run—and lost—in districts that could be competitive under true district-based elections.

At-large voting results in leaders being elected who participate in group-think, without diversity of thought, without the true representation of the entire community. I have watched as the Calvert County & St. Mary's Boards of Education repeatedly ignored constituents with whom they disagree. I have watched the County Commissioners do the same. All because they know they have the at-large voting system to protect them from accountability.

It's time for the General Assembly to take bold action to protect the one-person, one-vote promise of American democracy. I urge a **favorable, with amendments, report** on HB565.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Brandon Russell
Leonardtown, MD
brandon4stmarys@gmail.com

HB565 Testimony.pdf

Uploaded by: Brandon Russell

Position: FWA

Chair Wells, Vice Chair Kerr, and Distinguished Members of the Committee,

My name is Brandon Russell, and I am a resident of Maryland. I am writing in support of HB565, and **urge a favorable, with amendments report on this bill.**

I propose **amending** this bill to include language requiring any locally districted elected offices be elected by a plurality of votes from each district. Additionally, I propose listing this as an **emergency bill**—voting rights cannot wait until 2028.

In St. Mary's County, four members each of the Board of Education and the Board of County Commissioners must run in a district, while the fifth member runs at-large. However, all five elected positions for each board are voted on at-large. The existence of districts suggests that voters within those districts choose their own representative, but in practice they do not. This system is confusing, misleading, and creates an unnecessary barrier to voter understanding and engagement.

At-large voting also restricts the ability of constituents to hold their elected officials accountable. Voters in rural District A may prioritize issues like infrastructure, while voters in a more urban and populous District B may have very different concerns. When all votes are cast countywide, the priorities of larger districts can consistently override those of smaller or more rural communities, even when those communities are electing “their” district representative.

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It's time for the General Assembly to take bold action to protect the one-person, one-vote promise of American democracy. I urge a **favorable, with amendments, report** on HB565.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Brandon Russell
Leonardtown, MD
brandon4stmarys@gmail.com

20260209 Fair Representation Act.pdf

Uploaded by: Jana Wiener

Position: FWA

Testimony on HB 565
Fair Representation Act
Position: Favorable

I believe that at-large voting negatively impacts my small community in St. Mary's County, Maryland. I am a parent of two young boys in the public school system. I fully support the efforts of the General Assembly to pass this bill, which would require Board of Education races to be voted on by district in counties where they are currently voted on at-large, like mine. The amendment I urge you to adopt is that this bill also include county commissioners who are currently voted on at-large. Thank you for your service!

Favorable Testimony HB 565.pdf

Uploaded by: Julia Nichols

Position: FWA

Testimony on HB 565

Government, Labor and Elections Committee

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

Position: Favorable

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.

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. 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 Election 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.

Favorable Testimony HB 565.pdf

Uploaded by: Julia Nichols

Position: FWA

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.

Favorable with Amendments HB 565.pdf

Uploaded by: Julia Nichols

Position: FWA

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.

HB0565 written testimony 2.pdf

Uploaded by: Marcia Coe

Position: FWA

HB0565

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

February 11, 2026

Government, Labor, and Elections Committee

Position: FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS

Dear Members of the Committee,

I am a constituent residing in St. Mary's County, MD.

This bill would create a more equitable representation on our Board of Education.

I request that you vote FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS. The voting for the County Commissioners should also be done in the same manner with races to be voted on by district rather than at large.

Respectfully submitted,

Marcia Coe

HB 565 RCVMD Testimony - District Voting (Fair Rep

Uploaded by: Michelle Whittaker

Position: FWA

February 9, 2026

Government, Labor, and Elections Committee
Maryland House of Delegates
145 Lowe House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: House Bill 565 County Boards of Education - Elections - District Voting (Fair Representation Act)

Position: FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS

Dear Government, Labor, and Elections Committee Members:

Ranked Choice Voting Maryland (RCV Maryland) is committed to ensuring fair and representative elections for all Marylanders. Across the United States, winner-take-all, first-past-the-post elections often have non-majoritarian outcomes and can disenfranchise electoral communities - particularly voters of color.

The Campaign Legal Center (CLC) notes that at-large elections “can silence communities of color and deprive them of an equal opportunity to participate in the political process.”¹ The CLC along with other voting and civil rights groups have routinely recommended fair representation voting methods to address disparities and nonmajority outcomes.

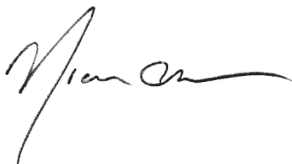
We recognize the goal of HB 565 is to ensure that voters within a district elect a representative of their choice. In order to allow for communities to be flexible in their ability to create fair representation, we strongly recommend the following options:

- **Option 1:** Remove “plurality of votes cast” and replace it with “majority of votes cast”
- **Option 2:** Remove “plurality of votes cast” and replace the language with “a fair voting method”

Option 1 would require a majority but may require an additional process if no candidate receives a majority of the vote. Option two would allow the respective jurisdiction to use a fair voting method of their choice that would create a more representative outcome based on vote shares.

We applaud the bill sponsor’s efforts to improve representation and welcome an opportunity to work on any necessary amendments.

Sincerely,



Michelle C. Whittaker
Executive Director
Ranked Choice Voting Maryland

¹ “What Is an At-Large Election?” (June 2024) <https://campaignlegal.org/update/what-large-election>

HB 565 - Commissioners of St. Mary's County OPPOSE

Uploaded by: Randy Guy

Position: UNF

ST. MARY'S COUNTY GOVERNMENT
**COMMISSIONERS OF
ST. MARY'S COUNTY**



James R. Guy, President
Michael R. Alderson, Jr., Commissioner
Eric S. Colvin, Commissioner
Michael L. Hewitt, Commissioner
Scott R. Ostrow, Commissioner

HB 565
County Boards of Education - Elections - District Voting
(Fair Representation Act)

COMMITTEE: Government, Labor and Elections
POSITION: Oppose

The Commissioners of St. Mary's County oppose **HB 565 - County Boards of Education - Elections - District Voting (Fair Representation Act)**. This bill would require an election of members of the Calvert County, Cecil County, Garrett County, Montgomery County, Queen Anne's County, and St. Mary's County boards of education who represent a specific district to be decided by a plurality of the votes cast within that district.

Decisions about form and character of local governments are best left in the hands of the local voters who live there— not imposed by state-authorized “one-size fits all” mandates.

We urge you to **report unfavorably on HB 565**. Thank you for your consideration as well as your attention to this matter, and thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony.

Sincerely,

COMMISSIONERS OF ST. MARY'S COUNTY


James Randy Guy, President

CSMC/AB/jb
T:/Consent/2026/004

Cc: Senator Jack Bailey
Delegate Matthew Morgan
Delegate Brian Crosby
Commissioner Mike Alderson, Jr.
Commissioner Eric Colvin
Commissioner Michael Hewitt
Commissioner Scott R. Ostrow
David Weiskopf, County Administrator
David Yingling, Deputy County Administrator
Buffy Giddens, County Attorney
John Sterling Houser, Deputy County Attorney

HB 565 - Oppose - County Boards of Education - Ele

Uploaded by: Sam Mathias

Position: UNF

BILL: House Bill 565
TITLE: County Boards of Education – Elections – District Voting (Fair Representation Act)
HEARING DATE: February 11, 2026
POSITION: UNFAVORABLE
COMMITTEE: Government, Labor, and Elections
CONTACT: Sam Mathias, Legal & Policy Director (smathias@mabe.org)

The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE), representing all the state’s local boards of education, **respectfully opposes House Bill 565, County Boards of Education – Elections – District Voting (Fair Representation Act).**

HB 565 would require that six local boards of education (Calvert, Cecil, Garrett, Montgomery, Queen Anne’s, and St. Mary’s) elect their regionally representative members solely by the voters residing within those regions. MABE respectfully suggests that this bill could be a local delegation bill, rather than as a statewide mandate prescribing a specific voting structure for selected jurisdictions.

Each of Maryland’s 24 local boards of education operates under a governance structure set forth in its own section of the Education Article. These structures were developed over time through local legislation and democratic processes and reflect different governmental arrangements of each county. As a result, board composition and election methods vary widely across the State. Some boards of education have a mix of at-large and regionally representative members. See, e.g., Charles County, Md. Code Ann., Ed. Art. § 3-501(a). Some boards have all at-large members. See., e.g., Frederick County, Md. Code. Ann., Ed. Art. § 3-5B-01(a). Others are structured such that each councilmanic district votes for its own representative on the school board. See., e.g., Dorchester County, Md. Code. Ann., Ed. Art. § 3-5A-02(b)(2). Still others operate under hybrid models that combine elected and appointed members. The six jurisdictions impacted by this bill have created a governance structure that enables all the county residents to vote for members of its board.

MABE supports preserving this overall governance flexibility and the long-standing legislative practice of allowing local governance structures to be shaped through local processes. While we understand the policy considerations reflected in House Bill 565, we are concerned that applying a uniform voting requirement to a limited number of counties could depart from that established approach.

For these reasons, MABE respectfully urges the Committee to consider whether this issue is better addressed at the local level and therefore opposes the bill. We respectfully request an unfavorable report.