



Time for Changing the Electoral System in Chesapeake- 2022

Now that the state has changed local elections to even number years, it is time to abandon the at-large voting system in Chesapeake due to its discriminatory impact on the minority population in the city. **First**, the at-large voting system is unconstitutional under Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. The Voting Rights Act of 1962 clearly prohibits voting practices or procedures that discriminate on the basis of race, color, or membership in one of the language minority groups identified in Section 4(f) (2) of the Act. **Secondly**, U.S District Court for Eastern Virginia, issued a memorandum about Virginia Beach's process for electing its city council was illegal because it discriminated against minorities. District Court Judge Raymond Jackson wrote in his judgement that "The at-large system in Virginia Beach City Council denies Hispanics, African Americans and Asians equal access to the electoral and political process." He further stated that Virginia Beach has "a history of discrimination in political representation. **Thirdly**, on March 18, 2020, Governor Ralph Northam signed HB 2198 requiring district representatives in city council and school board to be elected by voters living in their districts. **Fourthly**, in both case law and statutory law, it has been declared that at-large voting systems are categorically illegal. **Fifthly**, Governor Ralph Northam approved the landmark Voting Rights Act of Virginia. This law provides comprehensive protection against voter suppression, discrimination, or intimidation. Virginia is the first state in the nation to enact its own version of the Voters Rights Act. The Act prohibits at-large local elections if they dilute the voting power of racial minorities

Chesapeake is holding on to the at-large systems not only because it restricts minorities from electing people of their choice, but its makes it easier for the cohesive minority party to get elected and hold on to power with very little accountability to citizens. The at-large voting system is a plurality system wherein the candidate who wins the largest share of the vote wins the election. The candidate does not have to win a majority of the votes to be elected. These systems are referred to as first-past the post winner or winner take-all. This multi-winner system makes it possible for multiple candidate to be elected to an office. For example, there may be three seats available and five candidates are running for the three positions. Voters are asked to vote for the three candidates of the five, and the top three vote-getter win the election to the at-large seats.

It is important for Chesapeake citizens to understand that four of the city council member reside in zip code 23322, on in zip code 23323, One in 23321, and one in 23320. Zip Codes 23323, 23324 and 23325 have no representation on city council. In zip code 23324, South Norfolk, **59.2%** of the residents are African Americans and in zip code 23325, Greenbrier/ Washington borough, **40.6%** of the residents are African Americans. Also, **30.2 %** of the residents in zip code 23320 are African Americans. Clearly, at-large voting dilutes the minority vote in South Norfolk, Greenbrier/Washington, and the Deep Creek boroughs. Virginia Voting Right Acts, Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and case law clearly

makes at-large voting in Chesapeake illegal because the City's at-large voting system dilutes the minority vote. Residents in South Norfolk, Greenbrier/Washington and Deep Creek have no chances for electing candidates of their choice. South Norfolk is predominantly a minority district, but has no representation on city council because the at-large voting systems dilutes the minority votes. Similarly, the Greenbrier/Washington borough has a large minority population, yet no minority representation.

Profile of Each Zip Code

Zip Code	Population	Median HH Income	Blacks	Whites	# of Council Representation.
23320	51,797	\$91,629	29.6%	56.5%	1
23321	33,653	\$79,424	31.3%	61.3%	3
23322	60,473	\$92,509	10.7%	83.7%	5
23323	35,906	\$97,354	37.3%	60.5%	0
23324	22,851	\$58,046	58.3%	32.3%	0
23325	17,592	\$75,018	39.8%	50.9%	0

City Total Population: 251,268
 City average Household Income: \$81,261

The Republican Party in Chesapeake is a very cohesive group with a firm grip on holding on to their seats and the power that goes with managing the city. Under the plurality rules, fifty percent of the voters can, if they mostly support the same candidates, win all the seats. In fact, the majority block does not even have to compose 50 percent of the electorate. All that's is needed is for one large neighborhood or voting block to vote cohesively enough to build an insurmountable lead over the rest of the field. Republicans in Chesapeake have demonstrated that they have a minority election voting-block, but it is cohesive and yield results in an at-large voting system.

What you must ask yourself as a tax paying citizen, is this small minority voting block delivering the services, facilities, road repairs and construction, garbage and sewage services, quality of life enhancing facilities, schools and education, and police and public safety you need. The City Council has noted that it may terminate recycling or turn it over to a private entity for you to pay, failed in providing a performing Arts or Convocation Center large enough to graduate a senior class, or provide a sports complex and swimming pool for our athletes to train for competitive meets. These are quality of life enhancing ventures as well as economic engines that can increase the City's revenue. we submit to you that the current City Council does not have the will or progressive outlook for our city, and we need to make a change at the 2022 election.

With the State mandating local elections to be held on even numbered years, you have an opportunity to impact the quality of life for all citizens as well as contributing to progressive economic growth in the City which has been stagnant since 2005. Secondly, it is time to move to a ward/or borough voting system so that citizens in each area of the city can vote for candidates of their choice. Winning elections and holding on to power is not sufficient to manage a city. We need in Chesapeake a council that can adequately control and direct the public business of the City, that is, manage city actions, affairs, policies, and functions to the benefit of all citizens. We have an opportunity in 2022 to bring about progressive changes in the city when we vote. Voting is our way of making democracy a reality. The challenge in electing better council members is most often led by the affected voters themselves with the help of civic groups, church leaders, legal partners, and you. We encourage every voter to evaluate

each candidate's skills and commitments to progressive changes that will affect the quality of life for everyone. Make sure that the candidate has a solid commitment to improving the city, your life and the day-to-day issues such as public safety; policing, garbage disposal; road construction and repairs; recycling; taxing, economic development; and a commitment to improving the quality of life for all citizens. Also, candidates and organization must educate citizens of the issues and request their votes for these changes.

The Commonwealth of Virginia Department of Elections figures indicated that as of December 1, 2021, Chesapeake's active voter registration was 74,801; however, only a small percentage of the registered voters in Chesapeake voted. When you evaluate the last election in May of 2020, only **20%** of registered voters voted. In the 2018 election only **18%** of the registered voters voted. Of the votes cast in 2020, 29.3% voted for the mayor. Similarly, only 23.6% for Councilman Don J. Carey, III, 21.4% for Councilman Robert C. Ike, Jr., and 23.5% for S. Z. "Debbie" Ritter. Citizen participation is vastly lacking, and these elected officials have no mandates from the vast majority of citizens because they don't vote in local election. As a results the City Council seemingly have no concern about what citizens want and focus only on the constituents who voted for them which is primarily special interest groups, business owners and wealthy people. This is part of the reason the city of Chesapeake does not have a performing art facility, sports complex and swimming pool, convocation center. Our Mayor, who is the leader of the Council, has not made any progressive proposals to improve the quality of life for citizens in Chesapeake. Some progress has been made through the efforts of the Chesapeake Men for Progress, Chesapeake Leads (coalition of Black Civic leagues), Chesapeake Unit, NAACP, Fairfield/Parkview Civic League and Pughsville Civic League to get an Aquatic Center/Swimming Pools (#3) on the Council's priority list. However, it is going to take more citizens participation to make this a reality.

Voting has been referred to as the pillar of democracy. Well, Chesapeake citizens must begin voting for leaders that represent them and their ideas, and support their interests in the City's growth. This is why the up- coming election, it is critical that all registered voters vote. Secondly, we encouraged all citizens to lobby for changing city at-large voting system to a ward systems to reduce minority underrepresentation in the voting for candidates of their choice, and to comply with the law. When people are given the chance to vote, to choose their representatives, and their stance on social and political issues, then democracy will be working in Chesapeake. It is time for change in Chesapeake, and only your vote can make it possible. Yes, it's time to change the at-large system of voting in Chesapeake.

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