

Hewitt requests meeting between commissioners and library board

Posted by [Martin Fairclough](#) On 02/08/2018

Leonardtown, MD - *Editor's note: Below is a transcript read by St. Mary's County Commissioner Mike Hewitt [R – District 2] at the Board of County Commissioners meeting concerning the discussion about the St. Mary's County Library Board of Trustees.*

"Last week a hearing was held in Annapolis to discuss HB 136, a bill that could change the current process for commissioner appointments to the library board of trustees. It's no secret the past twelve months have seen more than enough controversy regarding our library system. Two trustee positions need to be filled due to expiring term limits and two other positions can be filled with current incumbents as they are not term limited and have requested re-appointment. These trustees review all applications from people seeking appointment to their board, determines who is most qualified and forwards those names to the commissioners for appointments. The trustees have selected their choices for the two term-limited seats along with two additional selections as alternate choices. They are recommending the renewal of the other two seats held by incumbents.

"This process of self-appointing board members for commissioners approval applies due to state law, therefore the hearing last week in Annapolis. Last week a local newspaper published an editorial casting doubt on the wisdom of changing the current law. In my opinion it was a balanced editorial, rooted in the First Amendment to our Constitution. Any infringement on First Amendment rights needs and should be vigorously opposed. Our right to free speech should never be compromised by political or religious opinions and I believe every Commissioner sitting at this table feels the same way.

"Back to the current situation where we find ourselves with a board of commissioners who won't make the trustees-recommended appointments and citizens gathering hundreds of names for a petition to address the issues. I believe that self-appointing Boards are bad government, especially when the candidate choices available are so limited. While the commissioners can be held accountable at the ballot box, as they well should be, there is no accountability to the voters for the library board of trustees. I do not believe the answer to our differences can or should be decided in Annapolis. I do believe we need to find solutions locally between the commissioners and the trustees. I have asked Commissioner President Guy and County Administrator Dr. Rebecca Bridgett to look into scheduling a joint meeting of both boards similar to meetings held with the Board of Education, the Metropolitan Commission and the Health Department. I recommend these meetings be held at least once a year to allow open discussions in full view of the public. Only once we commit to sitting down and solving our differences can we move forward. I thank all the citizens who have taken their time and energy to voice their opinions whether through attendance at the hearing in Annapolis, in letters to the editor, via email, on social media or by just plain discussions either over the phone or in person.

"As a Commissioner, I was not elected to do government business on social media or in the letter to the editor sections of the newspaper. The job of government takes place most Tuesdays of the week in this room usually starting at 9:00 a.m., with public forums and hearings usually held in the evening starting at 6:30 p.m. I strongly urge you to attend all meetings, forums and hearings. The commissioners want to know what issues are important to you. Finally, you will not see me conducting government business on social media or in the opinion pages of local newspapers."

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