

February 14, 2025

Maryland Ways and Means Committee
130-131 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: Support for H.B. 983, part of the Maryland Voting Rights Act

Dear Ways and Means Committee Members,

In 2025 and beyond, the best way we can prepare for attacks on voting rights and democracy at the federal level is to pass the Maryland Voting Rights Act (MDVRA) now. Recent polling shows that the MDVRA and each of its provisions are extremely popular among Maryland voters across race and party lines. Notably, 81% of Maryland voters [support an MDVRA](#), and 80% would like their state representative to prioritize its passage.

At the national level, we are witnessing attacks, not progress, on voting rights. The Trump Administration's Project 2025 agenda includes eliminating the enforcement of protections against voting discrimination, and congressional leadership is pushing anti-voter legislation that creates additional obstacles in voting and disproportionately impacts Black voters and other voters of color. Meanwhile, increasingly hostile federal courts, including the U.S. Supreme Court, have consistently eroded the protections offered by the federal Voting Rights Act of 1965 over the last several decades.

While Maryland has recently implemented several measures that make voting more equitable, Maryland voters still face barriers to the ballot box and discrimination in voting, such as unfair districts or at-large systems that weaken the voting power of Black voters and other voters of color, inaccessible polling locations, and insufficient language assistance for voters who don't speak English comfortably. Recent vote dilution challenges brought against Baltimore County and Federalsburg demonstrate the persistence of these problems in Maryland.

Altogether, the MDVRA will make Maryland's democracy more inclusive by:

- Expanding language assistance in elections for voters with limited English proficiency.
- Enshrining robust protections against discriminatory vote dilution and voter suppression into state law.
- Creating a central public hub for election data and information to promote transparency.
- Preventing the implementation of discriminatory and unlawful electoral changes before they occur.

We urge you to take action immediately on two aspects of this package, and then move to consider the rest.

H.B. 983 / S.B. 685 – Expanding Language-Related Assistance

H.B. 983 / S.B. 685 will ensure that voters with limited English proficiency (LEP) are not excluded from the voting process. This bill provides more access for LEP voters by expanding election-related language assistance in the parts of Maryland where it is not already required by federal law and in languages not already covered by such federal protections.

H.B. 983 / S.B. 685 builds on the federal VRA by requiring local governments to provide voting materials in languages spoken by at least 2% of the population in a locality. This is a lower population threshold than in the federal VRA, which would extend language assistance to more Maryland communities. H.B. 983 / S.B. 685 also requires assistance in more languages that are commonly spoken in Maryland but are not included in federal law, such as Amharic. Nearly four in five Maryland voters (79%) [support](#) expanding language assistance for voters with a limited understanding of English. If enacted, this legislation would help position the Free State as a leader in protecting the right to vote.

H.B. 1043 and S.B. 342 - Combating Racial Vote Dilution

We urge you to build upon H.B. 1043 and S.B. 342 to pass the strongest possible protections against election systems that drown out the voices of voters of color and prevent them from electing their preferred representatives, known as racial vote dilution. This legislation builds on the federal Voting Rights Act by providing a framework for both voters and local governments in Maryland to efficiently and cost-effectively identify and eliminate racial vote dilution.

The strongest version of this legislation will make this type of litigation less time-intensive and less costly than litigation under the federal VRA—not only for plaintiffs but also for local governments and all parties. More than three-quarters of Maryland voters (77%) [support](#) protections against racial vote dilution. If enacted, this legislation would immediately position the Free State as a leader in protecting the right to vote.

The MDVRA builds upon successful state VRAs that have already passed in Virginia, California, Washington, Oregon, New York, Connecticut, and Minnesota. Similar bills are also actively under active consideration in New Jersey and Colorado. The MDVRA will carry this momentum forward and provide some of the most robust state-level voting protections in the country.

Now is Maryland's time to lead. We encourage you to prioritize, pass, and fully fund the

MDVRA this legislative session, and we stand ready to work with you to secure this victory for all Maryland voters.

Sincerely,

1199SEIU United Healthcare Workers East, Maryland/DC
Advance Maryland
AFSCME Maryland Council 3
Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. Iota Upsilon Lambda Chapter
Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc., Pi Upsilon Lambda Chapter, Prince George's County
American Civil Liberties Union of Maryland
Anne Arundel County NAACP
Baltimore Renters United
Bannockburn Reason For Action (BRA) Indivisible
CAIR Maryland
Cambridge Indivisible
Campaign for Justice Safety & Jobs (CJSJ)
CANDLE
Common Cause Maryland
Definitive Mechanical LLC
Gibson-Banks Center for Race and the Law, University of Maryland Carey Law School
Indivisible Central Maryland
Indivisible Howard County
League of Women Voters Maryland
Maryland League of Conservation Voters
Mid-Atlantic Association of Alpha Phi Alpha Chapters
National Council of Jewish Women, Maryland
Organizing Black
Out 4 Justice
Ranked Choice Voting Maryland
SEIU Local 500
Showing Up for Racial Justice Baltimore (SURJ)
UNITE HERE Local 7
Wilder Strategy

350.org

Advancement Project
Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity Inc.
Black Girls Vote
Campaign Legal Center
CT Shoreline Indivisible
Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.
Demos
Fair Elections Center
FairVote
Institute for Responsive Government Action
LatinoJustice PRLDEF
NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF)

Popular Democracy
Public Justice Center
State Innovation Exchange (SiX)
The Workers Circle
Transformative Justice Coalition
We Choose Us