



Chair Brian Feldman  
Education, Energy and the Environment Committee  
2 West St., Senate Office Building  
Annapolis, MD 21401

Vice Chair Cheryl Kagan  
Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee  
2 West St., Senate Office Building  
Annapolis, MD 21401

**RE: SUPPORT FOR THE MARYLAND VOTING RIGHTS ACT OF 2024**

Dear Chair Feldman and Vice Chair Kagan:

We write to express our strong support for the Maryland Voting Rights Act (“MDVRA”). This landmark legislation would address discrimination against voters of color in Maryland and immediately position the Free State as a national leader on protecting the right to vote. For these reasons, the MDVRA is a top priority for the undersigned civil and voting rights organizations.

A decade after the Supreme Court’s disastrous Shelby County<sup>1</sup> decision that undercut the federal Voting Rights Act, many states are unfortunately moving backwards on ensuring free, fair, and nondiscriminatory elections.<sup>2</sup> And despite substantial recent progress in strengthening voting laws at the state level, many discriminatory barriers to equal participation still exist in the state for voters of color and voters whose first language is not English, particularly at the local level. As we enter another critical election cycle, it’s clear that now is the time for our State leaders to stand up for equal, inclusive democracy.

Maryland’s history of discrimination includes English literacy tests, property ownership requirements and entitlements linked to voting, as well as laws that carry forward discrimination in the criminal legal system into our democracy, and those forces are still felt today. In addition,

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<sup>1</sup> Shelby County v. Holder, 570 U.S. 529 (2013).

<sup>2</sup> Brennan Center for Justice, Voting Laws Roundup: February 2023 (February 22, 2023).

some local jurisdictions still use at-large elections<sup>3</sup> which can empower a white majority to capture most or all seats, even where there is a substantial population of Black, Indigenous, and other voters of color.

The MDVRA will set a new standard for protecting the right to vote by:

- Providing new legal tools to fight discriminatory voting rules and election systems in court.
- Launching a “preclearance” program that requires places with records of discrimination to prove that proposed voting changes will not harm voters of color before they can go into effect.
- Expanding language assistance for voters with limited English proficiency.
- Creating strong protections against voter intimidation, deception, or obstruction.

The MDVRA builds upon successful laws already passed in California, Washington, Oregon, Virginia, and New York, and Connecticut. Similar bills are also under consideration in Florida, Minnesota, and New Jersey this session. The MDVRA will carry forward this momentum and become one of the most comprehensive state-level voting rights acts in the country.

Now is Maryland’s time to lead. We encourage you to prioritize, and pass the MDVRA this legislative session, and we stand ready to work with you to secure this victory for all Maryland voters.

Sincerely,

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<sup>3</sup> Some examples of municipalities that have at-large election systems include Brentwood in Prince George’s County, Aberdeen in Harford County, and Frederick City in Frederick County. At-large election systems account for 63% of all municipal voting systems in the state, and an additional 10% have a mix of at-large and district seats.

ACLU of Maryland  
Common Cause Maryland  
NAACP Legal Defense Fund  
Campaign Legal Center  
NAACP Maryland State Conference  
League of Women Voters Maryland  
Movement Advancement Project  
Maryland League of Conservation Voters  
Maryland Votes for Animals, Inc.  
FairVote Action  
National Council of Jewish Women  
Maryland Action Team  
Caucus of African-American Leaders  
The Arc Maryland  
Public Justice Center  
No Boundaries Coalition  
Advance Maryland  
Mothers On The Move  
Lower Shore Progressive Caucus  
Declaration for American Democracy  
Coalition  
Indivisible Central Maryland  
AAAsk, LLC  
Definitive Mechanical  
Community Development Network of  
Maryland  
AFT-Maryland  
Public Citizen  
Montgomery County Women's Democratic  
Club  
SEIU Local 500

Get Money Out — Maryland  
Maryland Center on Economic Policy  
DemCast USA  
Fair Elections Center  
Human Rights Campaign  
Hip Hop Caucus  
LatinoJustice PRLDEF  
Asian and Pacific Islander American Vote  
(APIAVote)  
Demos  
Allen AME Church  
DoTheMostGood  
Center for Popular Democracy  
Cedar Lane Environmental Justice Ministry  
Council on American-Islamic Relations  
Stand Up America  
Everyone Votes Maryland Coalition  
Planned Parenthood of Maryland  
The Talking Drum Incorporated  
Secure Elections Network  
Franciscan Action Network  
STAR Scholars  
The Baltimore City Civilian Review Board  
End Citizens United/Let America Vote  
Showing Up for Racial Justice Annapolis  
and Anne Arundel County  
Quaker Voice of Maryland  
PETA  
Indivisible Howard County  
CAIR