



Ella Ennis, Legislative Chairman
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The Honorable Brian J. Feldman, Chairman
And Members of the Education, Energy and the Environment Committee
Maryland Senate, Annapolis, Maryland

RE: **SB 0660** – Voting Rights Act of 2023 – Counties and Municipalities - **UNFAVORABLE**

Dear Chairman Feldman and Committee Members,

The 1,220 members of the Maryland Federation of Republican Women strongly OPPOSE SB 0660 – *Voting Rights Act of 2024 – Counties and Municipalities* for these reasons:

- Election protections are already codified in the **Federal Voting Rights Act of 1965**. SB 0660 gives special preference to a “protected class” when all voters must be treated equally and have an equal voice in all elections.
- Many of the elements on pages 8-11 that the court may or may not consider in evaluating a claim of vote dilution, identified in this bill as “racially polarized voting”, **would not withstand a constitutional challenge**. Several violate the criteria required to determine vote dilution (known collectively as the Gingles criteria) established in 1986 by Supreme Court Justice William Brennan’s court opinion in *Thornburg v. Gingles*.
- The proposed legislation **will override county and municipal governing documents**, forcing jurisdictions to replace their legally chosen voting method with an alternative voting method that is unfamiliar to voters and often more cumbersome. Election chaos will ensue -- confused voters (some choosing not to vote) and increased wait times at the polls, especially with ranked-choice voting.
- Several items in the calculation of the point at which **language-related assistance** is required (referenced on pages 15-17) will **inflate the result**.
 - Pg 16 Lns 10 and 16 – “speak a particular language other than English” – would include in the calculation anyone who is multi-lingual (vs. English as their primary language – the question on the Census survey)
 - The definition of “Limited English Proficient” (pg 3 Lns 23-26) includes only those who responded “Very Well” to the Census survey response, ignoring those who responded that they speak English “Well”.



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- No English language proficiency determination or language-related assistance is needed for naturalized citizens to vote. The U.S. Naturalization interview and test requires that the applicant demonstrate an understanding of the English language, including the ability to read, write and speak basic English, before they take their Oath of Allegiance to the United States.
- “Racially polarized voting” is based on the false premise that all voters of a given race or language group think and vote alike. SB 0660 insults minority citizens by presuming they are unable to make voting decisions on their own – that they are dependent on “group think”.
- Organizations whose mission would be frustrated by a violation or who would expend resources as a result of a violation of this section in order to fulfill its mission under this subtitle would give organizations (within and outside Maryland) more rights than Maryland’s citizens.

Our democracy was founded on the principle of “one-person, one-vote”. Requiring voter ID is the best method to ensure that an individual’s vote has not been stolen by another. It is disheartening that that protection was not included in this bill.

Please give an **UNFAVORABLE** Report to **SB 0660**.

Sincerely,
Ella Ennis
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