



TESTIMONY FOR HB0800 MARYLAND VOTING RIGHTS ACT OF 2024 – COUNTIES AND MUNICIPALITIES

Bill Sponsor: Delegate Smith

Committee: Ways and Means

Organization Submitting: Maryland Legislative Coalition

Person Submitting: Cecilia Plante, co-chair

Position: FAVORABLE

I am submitting this testimony in favor of HB0800 on behalf of the Maryland Legislative Coalition. The Maryland Legislative Coalition is an association of activists - individuals and grassroots groups in every district in the state. We are unpaid citizen lobbyists, and our Coalition supports well over 30,000 members.

While Maryland is a state that can generally be proud of its record of inclusivity and accessibility in the voting process, there are areas in Maryland that continue to make it harder to vote, particularly for people of color.

This bill, if enacted, would restore the full power of the Federal Voting Rights Act. Specifically, it would –

- Prevent voting discrimination before it occurs by requiring counties and other jurisdictions with a demonstrated history of discrimination to get pre-approval of certain voting changes from the Attorney General or a court;
- Expand protections for voters who don't speak English as their primary language;
- Protect voters against intimidation and deceptive practices;
- Make it easier for voters experiencing discrimination to fight back in court; and
- Add critical research and enforcement tools, such as a statewide database of demographics and voting rules.

Our members want to see Maryland's voting system rise to the level that was envisioned in the original Federal Voting Rights Act. We support this bill and recommend a **FAVORABLE** report in committee.