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March 25, 2025

SUPPORT: SB 342 - Voting Rights Act of 2025 - Counties and Municipalities

Mr. Chair and Members of the Committee:

Maryland LCV is submitting this testimony to support SB 342 - Voting Rights Act (VRA) of 2025 - Counties and Municipalities. We thank Senator Sydnor for his leadership on this issue. Maryland cannot have a healthy environment without an engaged and active democracy, and that begins with lowering the barriers at the ballot box.

This bill will enact protections against racial vote dilution in Maryland. Racial vote dilution occurs when electoral practices, such as at-large elections or unfair district maps, weaken the voting strength of voters of color, effectively denying them meaningful political representation. The protections provided in this bill are essential to ensuring that all Marylanders, particularly those from historically disenfranchised communities, have an equal opportunity to elect representatives of their choice.

SB 342 builds on the protections provided in the federal VRA by implementing streamlined standards and procedures that both protect the freedom to vote, and make this type of litigation less time-intensive and costly than litigation under the federal VRA. Although Maryland law features important pro-voter policies, it contains no protection against racial vote dilution, and recent challenges to racially dilutive voting systems in Federalsburg and Baltimore County underscore the crucial need for these kinds of protections.

In addition to protecting access to the ballot box, prohibiting vote dilution helps create a more inclusive and accountable democracy. When voters of color are systematically prevented from electing their preferred candidates, entire communities are left without a voice in decisions that directly impact their lives. Combatting vote dilution is a necessary step toward making the vision of a government that is truly of, by, and for the people a reality.

We urge a favorable report.