



## **Testimony of CANDLE**

### **Regarding S.B. 342 Voting Rights Act of 2025 - Counties and Municipalities**

**Submitted by Birgit Sharp on March 21, 2025**

**Position: Favorable**

This testimony is being submitted on behalf of CANDLE, the Community Action Network for Democracy, Liberties and Equality, based in Anne Arundel and Calvert counties. (See our organization description below.) <sup>1</sup>

CANDLE strongly urges you pass SB 342 to enact protections against racial voter dilution in Maryland. Voter dilution makes it difficult or impossible for certain groups to get legislators that represent their needs. This is not “a government of the people, by the people, and for the people” as promised by the US Constitution.

Racial voter 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.

Although Maryland law features important pro-voter policies, it contains no protection against racial voter dilution. Recent challenges to racially dilutive voting systems in Federalsburg and Baltimore County underscore the crucial need for these kinds of protections.

The Voting Rights Act of 1965 was one of the most transformative civil rights laws in U.S. history. It addressed a long history of discrimination in voting by prohibiting racial voter dilution and voter suppression. However, federal courts have severely reduced its effectiveness. Meanwhile, the federal and state governments are not only failing to protect against discrimination in voting, but instead are advancing anti-voter policies.

SB 342 builds on the protections provided in the federal VRA by implementing standards and procedures that both protect the freedom to vote and make related litigation less time-intensive and costly than under the federal VRA.

Prohibiting voter 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. If we want full participation in our democracy, people’s votes need to matter. More than three-quarters of Maryland voters (77%) support<sup>2</sup> protections against racial voter dilution.

Protections against voter dilution, along with the rest of the Maryland Voting Rights Act package, will help ensure no eligible voter in Maryland is left behind at the ballot box.

1 Candle is a community organization, developed to safeguard our democracy and protect vulnerable populations. Voting rights is one of our top priorities, as it is essential to every democracy.

2 <http://www.naacpldf.org/wp-content/uploads/IMPACT-LDF-MDVRA-Key-Findings>.