

BILL NUMBER SB 342

BILL TITLE: Voting Rights Act of 2025 - Counties and Municipalities

POSITION: Favorable



March 21, 2025

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB342

To the Honorable Chair Vanessa Atterbeary, Vice Chair Wilkins, and Members of the Ways & Means Committee:

Ranked Choice Voting (RCV) Maryland, urges the committee to pass SB 342 to 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.

We recognize that the Voting Rights Act of 1965 was one of the most transformative civil rights laws in U.S. history. At its height, Section 2 of the federal VRA addressed the long history of discrimination in voting by prohibiting racial vote dilution and voter suppression. However, federal courts, including the U.S. Supreme Court, have severely limited the federal VRA's protections in cases like *Shelby County v. Holder* (2013) and *Brnovich v. DNC* (2021). Meanwhile, the federal government is failing to protect against discrimination in voting.

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. Indeed, more than three-quarters of Maryland voters (77%) support protections against racial vote dilution.

Protections against vote 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. For these reasons, we urge a favorable report on SB 342.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Owen Anderson".

Owen Anderson, Deputy Director
Ranked Choice Voting Maryland