

Date of Hearing: January 27, 2026

Jo Shifrin

Bethesda, MD 20817

TESTIMONY ON SB 255- POSITION: FAVORABLE

Voting Rights Act of 2026 - Counties and Municipal Corporations

TO: Chair Brian Feldman, Vice Chair Cheryl Kagan, and members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

FROM: Jo Shifrin

OPENING: My name is Jo Shifrin. I am a resident of District 16. I am submitting this testimony in support of SB 255, Voting Rights Act of 2026 - Counties and Municipal Corporations.

First, I'd like to thank Sen. Charles Sydnor for sponsoring this legislation and the members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee for conducting this hearing so early in the legislative term.

My support for this legislation comes from my grounding in Jewish values. Jews believe that it is our responsibility to play an active role in our community. Rabbi Yitzhak taught that "A ruler is not to be appointed unless the community is first consulted" (Babylonian Talmud Berachot 55a). Rabbi Yitzhak further explained that in the Torah, Bezalel could be chosen to build the Tabernacle *only with the community's approval*. This deeply embedded ethic of political participation has guided Jews to enthusiastically participate in the American electoral process and to support the opportunity for all people to do so on an equal basis.

When SB 255 is enacted, it will protect against racial vote dilution in Maryland. Racial vote dilution happens when electoral practices, such as at-large elections or unfair district maps weaken the voting strength of voters of color, effectively denying them meaningful participation.

For 60+ years, the federal Voting Rights Act of 1965 served as the nation's most effective tool for tackling discriminatory voting practices. In particular, Section 2 prohibited racial voting dilution and voting suppression. However, the federal courts—including the Supreme Court—have severely limited this protection with cases like *Shelby County v. Holder (2013)*, etc. and is now poised to rule on the applicability of Section 2 to the redistricting process and meaningful representation for communities of color in *Louisiana v. Callais (2025)*.

Additionally, the federal government is failing to protect against intimidation and discrimination in our voting processes, and is actively promoting anti-voter policies. Therefore, Maryland legislators have the responsibility to safeguard fair and equal access to the ballot.

Combatting vote dilution is imperative: when voters of color are systematically prevented from electing the candidates of their choice, they are left without a voice in decisions that directly impact their lives. SB 255 will help ensure that every eligible voter has an equal opportunity to select the candidates who best represent them.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report on SB 255.