

January 23, 2026

**Voting Rights Act of 2026 – Counties and Municipal Corporations
Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee**

Position: Favorable

My name is Tatiana Santos and I am a resident of Frederick, a community organizer with the Indivisible Maryland Coalition, and a democracy defender.

I strongly urge the Committee to pass SB 255 to enact protections 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 and their communities meaningful political participation. The protections outlined in SB 255 are essential to ensuring that all Marylanders, particularly those from historically disenfranchised communities, have the equal opportunity to elect representatives of their choice.

For over sixty years, the federal Voting Rights Act (VRA) of 1965 served as the nation's most effective tool for tackling discriminatory voting practices. 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 and Section 5 of the federal VRA stopped discriminatory practices before they occurred through preclearance. However, federal courts, including the U.S. Supreme Court, have severely limited the federal VRA's protections through cases like *Shelby County v. Holder* (2013), which gutted the coverage formula in the preclearance program, and *Brnovich v. DNC* (2021), which made it difficult—if not impossible—to challenge discriminatory voter suppression. And, now Section 2's applicability to the redistricting process and meaningful representation for communities of color is under threat in *Louisiana v. Callais* (2025).

Meanwhile, the federal government is not only failing to protect against intimidation and discrimination in our voting processes, but is actively advancing anti-voter policies. At a time when federal voting rights protections have been weakened and enforcement has become increasingly uncertain, Maryland legislators have both the authority and the responsibility to safeguard fair and equal access to the ballot.

As a resident of Frederick County, I am deeply concerned about intimidation practices that will occur in the upcoming election. We have several conservative candidates who are unafraid to conduct illegal practices at the voting locations. If voters are stripped from having any recourse, it weakens our ability to continue participating in this 250-year democratic experiment.

SB 255 meets this perilous moment by building on the protections provided in the federal VRA with streamlined standards and procedures designed to both protect the freedom to vote and to make this type of litigation less time-intensive and costly than similar litigation under the federal VRA. Maryland law currently 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 our state.

Combatting vote dilution is an important and necessary step towards making a vision of a government that is truly of, by, and for the people a reality. When voters of color are systematically prevented from electing the candidates of their choice, entire communities are left without a voice in decisions that directly impact their lives. Simply put, prohibiting vote dilution helps create a more inclusive and accountable democracy.

SB 255 strengthens Maryland's democratic institutions, honors the legacy of the federal Voting Rights Act, and helps ensure that every eligible voter has an equal opportunity to participate in choosing who represents them within their local government. For these reasons, I respectfully urge a favorable report on SB 255.