



TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SENATE BILL 255

Voting Rights Act OF 2026 - SB 255/ HB 350

TO: Senator Charles E. Sydnor, III, Chair, and members of the Education, Energy, and Environment Committee

FROM: **Trina Selden**, Founder and Executive Director, Out For Justice

DATE: January 23, 2026

My name is Trina Selden, and I am the Founder and Executive Director of Out for Justice, an organization dedicated to dismantling barriers to reentry and advocating for the rights and full civic participation of justice-impacted individuals and communities across Maryland.

I am here today to express strong support for SB 255 / HB 350, the Voting Rights Act of 2026, a bill that will prohibit election systems at the county and municipal level that dilute the political power of voters based on race, color, or language minority status.

SB 255 / HB 350 is important because it directly addresses racial vote dilution—a practice in which an electoral system impairs the ability of members of a protected class to elect candidates of their choice or meaningfully influence election outcomes. Under this bill, jurisdictions may not impose or apply a method of election that weakens the voting strength of people in protected classes. The bill defines a “protected class” to include persons based on race, color, or membership in a language minority group, and it provides tools to challenge discriminatory systems in court.

This legislation fills a critical gap in Maryland law. Unlike the federal Voting Rights Act, which has been weakened over time by court decisions, Maryland currently has no clear statewide protection against election methods that dilute the votes of communities of color at the local level. SB 255 / HB 350 would change that by creating a clear, state-level standard to protect all voters from discriminatory electoral systems.

As someone who has lived through the consequences of exclusion from full civic participation—including being denied the right to register to vote after completing probation—I understand firsthand how deeply disenfranchisement harms not just individuals but entire communities**. It sends the message that some voices matter less than others. When electoral systems continue to weaken the power of voters of color, the promise of equal representation is denied. This impacts decisions about schools, policing, housing, and community investment—issues that touch every family and neighborhood.

SB 255 / HB 350 would empower courts to evaluate when voting patterns show polarized voting and whether existing election methods dilute the voting strength of protected groups. It authorizes not only the Attorney General but also private citizens or groups to bring actions to



enforce these protections, and it directs courts to consider remedies that can correct discriminatory systems.

Protecting voting rights is essential to ending cycles of exclusion and reintegration barriers after justice involvement. For many people returning home from incarceration, voting is more than a civic act—it is a powerful affirmation of belonging, agency, and dignity. Ensuring that everyone has an equal opportunity to elect representatives of their choice strengthens faith in our democracy and improves civic participation.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge this Committee to issue a favorable report on SB 255 / HB 350 and support its passage. This bill will make Maryland a fairer, more inclusive democracy—one in which every eligible voter truly counts.

Thank you

Sincerely,
Trina Selden
Founder and Executive Director
Out For Justice