



NAACP

Maryland

STATE CONFERENCE

TESTIMONY TO THE SENATE EDUCATION, HEALTH, AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

SB-413 Voting Rights Act of 2022 – Counties and Municipalities

POSITION: Favorable

Willie Flowers, President

DATE: February 23, 2022

The NAACP Maryland State Conference is the oldest civil rights organization in the state and we are happy to support SB 413 or the voting rights act of 2022. The bill is a guide to maintaining access to the ballot and will also give oversight in cases of redistricting and reapportionment. This bill is the lens that is needed to at least control how politics and money influences who gets elected to local governments.

Currently, the state of Maryland does not in a way pave a way for population increases in certain jurisdictions to have representation. In certain counties like Saint Mary's and Charles to name 2, they still have county council members who are elected at-large although the population in both these counties have increased dramatically. Not only has the number of elected officials have not changed but the idea of having districts has not either. This creates a problem for fair representation. Each resident should have a council representative who represents them. Just like their senator and congressman. I have to remark here that the current structure of having delegates elected at-large doesn't allow for fair representation either.

A few years ago, Howard County, Md also existed with an at-large structure for the school board. Luckily, a law was passed by the Howard County delegation to create districts that complimented the Howard County council and added 2 at-large members. This was important because some of the members lived in the same districts.

These are small local examples of how SB 413 will influence the way we do things in the state of Maryland. Everyone needs representation and as populations change at the state and local level we must have a policy making entity within the state government to use the law to mediate this process so that every citizen has access to the ballot and has representation.

Finally, I recently learned that the redistricting plan for the Baltimore County council was challenged by the NAACP Baltimore County Branch, Common Cause Maryland and the

NAACP

Maryland State Conference

8775 Cloudleap Court, Columbia, MD 21045 Suite 200

www.naacpmaryland.org

League of Women Voters. Their case was upheld by the US District Court and the county now has to start over again because local elected officials did not consider justice and the Voting Rights Act. Instead they played politics as usual and the county is in the news.

SB 413 can be used to avoid those types of local matters from going to the federal courts and they can hopefully be handled in the civil rights division of the Maryland Attorney General's office.