



MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND
WOMEN'S DEMOCRATIC CLUB

P.O. Box 34047, Bethesda, MD 20827

www.womensdemocraticclub.org

**SB0878-Voting Rights Act of 2023-Counties and Municipalities
Education, Energy and the Environment Committee –March 15, 2023
SUPPORT**

Thank you for this opportunity to submit written testimony concerning an important priority of the Montgomery County Women's Democratic Club (WDC) for the 2023 legislative session. WDC is one of the largest and most active Democratic clubs in our state, with hundreds of dues-paying members, including many elected officials.

WDC has formed an *ad hoc* committee, Advancing Democracy in Maryland, (ADM) to advocate for a menu of legislation that empowers voters, creates equality of voice and representation, and ensures the greater responsiveness of government institutions. WDC is proud to join Common Cause Maryland, ACLU Maryland, Legal Defense Fund, and the Campaign Legal Center in advocating for passage of SB0878. Modeled after the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Act of New York, the Maryland Voting Rights Act (MDVRA) will protect voters of color and Maryland's democracy, enshrining strong voter protections in Maryland law— even as the federal Voting Rights Act of 1965 may be further eroded by the U.S. Supreme Court.

According to ACLU Maryland, discriminatory structures and voting rights abuses persist among hundreds of local government entities in the Free State. Key provisions of the MDVRA that provide legal remedies for preventing discrimination and enhancing voter participation include:

- Launching a pre-clearance program that puts the burden on local governments with records of discrimination to prove that certain voting changes—such as redistricting— won't harm voters of color before they can go into effect.
- Creating strong protections against voter intimidation, deception, or obstruction
- Expanding language assistance for voters with limited English proficiency
- Enforcing prohibitions against vote denial and dilution
- Establishing a statewide public database to serve as a central repository for election and demographic data, fostering transparency and evidence-based practice in election administration.

As stated by the advocacy group sponsors, "A Maryland Voting Rights Act will provide a means of ensuring that all voters are able to cast a meaningful ballot, but it will especially help to accelerate the participation of voters of color who have historically been denied an equal opportunity to participate in the political process.

We ask for your support for SB0878 and strongly urge a favorable Committee report.

Diana E. Conway
President
WDC

Lynn Olson
Advancing Democracy
in MD Committee