



Get Money Out – Maryland

Baltimore County Progressive Democrats Club

Baltimore Nonviolence Center

Be the Change Bmore

Caucus of African American Leaders of Anne Arundel

Chesapeake Climate Action Network

Common Cause Maryland

Don't Shop on Tuesdays

Do the Most Good

Indivisible Central Maryland

Indivisible Howard County

Indivisible Montgomery

Indivisible Worcester

J Walkers Action Group

League of Women Voters of Baltimore City

Maryland Peace Action

Maryland Poor People's Campaign

Maryland United for Peace and Justice

Matthew Henson Community Development Center

National Association of Social Workers - Maryland

Our Revolution Maryland

Progressive Maryland

Randallstown Branch NAACP

Represent Maryland

St. Ignatius Justice & Peace Committee

Southwest Baltimore County Democratic Club

WISE –Women Indivisible Strong Effective

March 15, 2023

Support SB 878 – Voting Rights Act of 2023 – Counties and Municipalities

Charlie Cooper, Convener

For the People – Maryland is a coalition of state nonprofit advocacy and community organizations that stands for political equality, equal access to the ballot for voters and candidates and fair districts regardless of race, ethnicity, or party affiliation, and reducing the corrupting influence of concentrated wealth in our political system. Every citizen should have equal access to the ballot as a voter or as a candidate.

SB 878 seeks to protect equal access to the ballot – the most fundamental principle upon which our Coalition, State, and nation are based. We support the thesis of the bill that classes of voters need to be protected because history provides undeniably clear evidence of past discrimination against certain communities that traditionally have faced obstacles to voting, running for office, and electing candidates of their choice.

Here are reasons we endorse SB 878:

- Its statistical approach to elections for local offices would counter possible attempts by local governments to disempower protected classes of voters. The Court should consider factors such as participation in voting and access to campaign-finance, as well as evidence of discrimination in housing, transportation, education, employment, and the criminal justice system as important determinants of communities that need to be protected.
- It provides a useful compendium of possible remedies for the Court and Civil Rights Division to employ.

- Mechanisms to allow communities to resolve complaints directly with local governments would save time and money, instead of filing for relief with the Court or the Civil Rights Division.
- Since communities seeking redress are very likely to be financially disadvantaged, the bill wisely allows for organizations representing those communities to receive compensation for expenses. Similarly, communities that comprise a substantial number of non-English-speaking members will be able to conduct business with local governments in their preferred language.
- The pre-clearance mechanism in the bill has been shown to work to alleviate severe discrimination against a protected class in voting.
- Creating an Election Database and Information Office would be a positive step toward objective evaluation of local government actions regarding voting rights and political equity.

SB 878 is landmark legislation that provides a toolkit of proactive provisions to ensure that voting rights and political equality are protected throughout the State of Maryland. We strongly urge a favorable report.