

Dear Members of the House Ways and Means Committee,

My name is Rianna Eckel, and I am a resident of the 43<sup>rd</sup> district. I am submitting this testimony as a member of Showing Up for Racial Justice Baltimore, a group of individuals working to move white folks as part of a multi-racial movement for equity and racial justice in Baltimore City, Baltimore County, and Howard County. We are also working in collaboration with the Campaign for Justice, Safety and Jobs, and ACLU of Maryland. **I am testifying in support of the Voting Rights Act of 2023, HB 1104.**



Yes, Maryland has made progress in recent years to improve voting rights access. Yet Maryland has a history of discrimination against Black and Brown voters. As recently as 2021, the ACLU and Baltimore County NAACP brought suit to challenge Voting Rights Act violations in proposed redistricting plans. Furthermore, the Supreme Court has recently weakened enforcement of the national Voting Rights Act. We need a Maryland-specific Voting Rights Act to improve protections for historically marginalized voters and to act as safeguard against weakened national enforcement.

This proposed bill would establish requirements for local governments when they plan redistricting or change election methods. It would also establish a statewide database of demographic and election information; this database would promote transparency and evidence-based practices. Furthermore, it would require pre-clearance from the Maryland Attorney General's office to confirm or deny local government remedies addressing past violations.

A few other states, like New York and Virginia, have enacted their own state Voting Rights Acts. In passing a Maryland version, our state would be joining good company. Maryland voters deserve the strongest possible protection of their voting rights.

It is for these reasons that I am encouraging you to vote **in support of the Voting Rights Act of 2023, HB 1104.**

Thank you for your time, service, and consideration.

Sincerely,  
Rianna Eckel  
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Showing Up for Racial Justice Baltimore