



## **Testimony in SUPPORT of HB 1104**

Voting Rights Act of 2023 - Counties and Municipalities  
House Ways & Means Committee

March 7, 2023

Dear Honorable Chair Atterbeary, Vice-Chair Wilkins, and Members of the Committee,

CASA is pleased to offer favorable testimony in strong support of HB 1104- Voting Rights Act of 2023 - Counties and Municipalities. CASA is the largest immigrant services and advocacy organization in Maryland, and in the Mid-Atlantic region, with a membership of over 120,000 Black and Latino immigrants and working families. This legislation represents an important step towards equity and fair practices in our electoral process and voting system by implementing several changes that protect the right to vote and increase voter participation in local county and municipal elections.

Although Maryland has advanced many progressive policies recent changes to Voting Rights protection in federal law leave many Voters of Color- Black, indigenous, and Latino- at a disadvantage in comparison to their White counterparts. Maryland's history of discrimination includes English literacy tests, property ownership requirements, and entitlements linked to voting, as well as laws that carry forward discrimination in the criminal legal system into our democracy, some of which are still in force today. Some local jurisdictions still use at-large elections which can empower a white majority to capture most or all seats, even where there is a substantial population of Black, Indigenous, and other Voters of Color. Following the 2020 U.S. Census and redistricting in 2021, several counties faced litigation over unfair gerrymandering, such as Baltimore County, where a federal court struck down the redistricting plan as racially discriminatory.

HB 1104 ensures that there is preclearance before local counties or municipalities make changes to their voting system, prohibits vote denial and dilution, provides much-needed language access to Voter whose primary language is not English, stops voter intimidation, creates a statewide database fit our current era, and make private enforcement feasible.

As the largest immigrant rights advocacy organization in Maryland, CASA is keen on the importance of providing language assistance to all voters. Language assistance in the electoral is extremely important in allowing voters to fully understand the process and exercise their civic responsibility and duties.

Maryland can enact its own fully effective Voting Rights Act (MDVRA), building on models enacted recently in New York, Virginia, and other states. A MDVRA will protect Voters of Color in the Free State regardless of what direction the Supreme Court pushes federal law.

CASA strongly urges this committee to issue a **favorable report for HB 1104** to strengthen and create a robust electoral process for all Maryland residents.