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TO: The Honorable Vanessa Atterbary
Chair, Ways and Means Committee

FROM: Hannibal G. Williams II Kemerer
Chief Counsel, Legislative Affairs, Office of the Attorney General

RE: HB 1104 – Voting Rights Act of 2023 – Counties and Municipalities
(Support in Concept)

The Voting Rights Act of 1965¹ is, by many accounts, the most effective civil rights law in American history. Due to challenges at the federal level, its effectiveness has become vulnerable. In order to secure the voting rights of Marylanders and ensure that no citizen experiences voting rights abuses without the appropriate resources available to remedy them, Maryland needs to pass a state Voting Rights Act. The Office of Attorney General supports House Bill 1104, Delegate Stephanie Smith's Voting Rights Act of 2023 – Counties and Municipalities, as appropriate legislation meeting the demand.

House Bill 1104 would: (1) institute preclearance by the Attorney General in covered jurisdictions for election changes such as redistricting, (2) prohibit vote denial and dilution, (3) provide voting materials for non-English speaking communities, (4) provide a civil cause of action for Marylanders to combat voter intimidation, (5) establish a state-wide database of election and demographic data, and (6) ensure that efforts to challenge voting rights violations are feasible by making attorneys' fees and costs recoverable by prevailing plaintiffs.

The aim of this bill is not to cast Maryland as a state with rampant voting rights abuses, but rather to provide our citizens with adequate legal resources to combat violations and abuses wherever, if ever, they may exist.

We urge a favorable report on HB 1104.

¹ 52 U.S.C. § 10101, et seq.

cc: The Honorable Stephanie Smith & Committee Members