



Barbara Nouveau, Founder, DoTheMostGood

Committee: Ways and Means

Testimony on: HB1104 – Voting Rights Act of 2023 - Counties and Municipalities

Position: Favorable

Hearing Date: February 28, 2023

Bill Contact: Delegate Stephanie Smith

DoTheMostGood (DTMG) is a progressive grassroots organization with members across Montgomery County and several neighboring counties. DTMG supports legislation and activities protecting the fundamental rights of all Maryland residents and promoting equity across all our diverse communities.

DTMG enthusiastically supports HB1104 – Voting Rights Act of 2023 - Counties and Municipalities. This bill is on a par—at the State level—with the Federal Voting Rights of 1965.

The 1965 Voting Rights Act was the most significant statutory change in the relationship between the federal and state governments in the area of voting since Reconstruction. Between August 4 when the bill was signed into law and the end of 1965, a **quarter of a million new Black voters had been registered**, one-third by federal examiners. By the end of 1966, only four out of 13 southern states had fewer than 50% of African Americans registered to vote. The Act was readopted and strengthened in 1970, 1975, and 1982. On June 25, 2013, the U.S. Supreme Court, in *Shelby County v. Holder* held that using a certain formula in the Voting Rights Act to determine which jurisdictions are subject to the preclearance requirement of the Voting Rights Act was unconstitutional.

What transpired following “Shelby” was that the states required to obtain preclearance before implementing any changes or new requirements to their voting laws went on a spree that continues to this day. Over the past 10 years, these states and others that follow them have invented a multitude of ways for local governments to deny, impair or diminish the right to vote of protected class members.

HB1104 is a masterclass in calling out the myriad ways local governments can subvert Federal law in their march to disenfranchise populations of color and other protected classes, and sets up remedies for each. We especially applaud the establishment of both a pre-clearance program and a statewide election database and information office. Sadly, there are jurisdictions in Maryland trying to make it harder for certain people to vote, although they do not characterize it that way. Passing this bill will be a strong step towards stopping the ground from shifting for too many people.

In sum, DTMG applauds this bill for taking significant steps to protect our election officials and workers and subjecting any individual who violates these protections to significant penalties. Ensuring election officials and workers that they will be safe when performing their duties is the foundation of conducting free and open elections that are equally available to all eligible voters.

DTMG strongly supports HB1104 and urges a **FAVORABLE** report on the bill.

Respectfully submitted,

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