



The Honorable Wes Moore
Governor of Maryland
100 State Circle
Annapolis, MD 21401

The Honorable Bill Ferguson
President Pro Tempore, Maryland Senate
State House H-107
100 State Circle
Annapolis, MD 21401

The Honorable Adrienne A. Jones
Speaker, Maryland House of Representatives
State House H-101
100 State Circle
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: SUPPORT FOR THE MARYLAND VOTING RIGHTS ACT

Dear Governor Moore, Senate President Ferguson, and Speaker Jones:

We write to express our strong support for the Maryland Voting Rights Act (“MDVRA”). This landmark legislation would address discrimination against voters of color in Maryland and immediately position the Free State as a national leader on protecting the right to vote. For these reasons, the MDVRA is a top priority for the undersigned civil and voting rights organizations.

As we approach the tenth anniversary of the Supreme Court’s disastrous *Shelby County* decision that undercut the federal Voting Rights Act,¹ many states are moving backwards on ensuring free,

¹ *Shelby County v. Holder*, 570 U.S. 529 (2013).

fair, and nondiscriminatory elections.² Following the historic election of Maryland's first Black governor and attorney general, we need our leaders to stand up for equal, inclusive democracy.

Despite Maryland's progressive reputation, many discriminatory barriers to equal participation still exist in the state for voters of color and voters whose first language is not English, particularly at the local level. 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. In addition, some local jurisdictions³ 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.

The MDVRA will set a new standard for protecting the right to vote by:

- Providing new legal tools to fight discriminatory voting rules and election systems in court.
- Launching a “preclearance” program that requires places with records of discrimination to prove that proposed voting changes will not harm voters of color before they can go into effect.
- Expanding language assistance for voters with limited English proficiency.
- Creating strong protections against voter intimidation, deception, or obstruction.
- Establishing a central hub for election data and demographic information that will empower officials and community members to ensure accessible elections.

The MDVRA builds upon successful laws already passed in California, Washington, Oregon, Virginia, and New York—which enacted the [John R. Lewis Voting Rights Act of New York](#) in 2022. Similar bills are also under consideration in Connecticut and New Jersey this session. The MDVRA will carry forward this momentum and become one of the most comprehensive state-level voting rights acts in the country.

Now is Maryland's time to lead. We encourage you to prioritize, pass, and fully fund the MDVRA this legislative session, and we stand ready to work with you to secure this victory for all Maryland voters.

Sincerely,

² Brennan Center for Justice, [Voting Laws Roundup: February 2023](#) (February 22, 2023).

³ Some examples of municipalities that still have at-large election systems include Federalsburg in Caroline County, Aberdeen in Harford County, and La Plata in Charles County.

ACLU of Maryland
Common Cause Maryland
NAACP Legal Defense Fund
Campaign Legal Center
NAACP Maryland State Conference
Movement Advancement Project
Maryland League of Conservation Voters
Maryland Votes for Animals, Inc.
FairVote Action
National Council of Jewish Women,
Maryland Action Team
Caucus of African-American Leaders
The Arc Maryland
Public Justice Center
No Boundaries Coalition
Advance Maryland
Mothers On The Move
Lower Shore Progressive Caucus
Declaration for American Democracy
Coalition
Indivisible Central Maryland
AAAsk, LLC
Definitive Mechanical
Community Development Network of
Maryland

AFT-Maryland
Indivisible Howard County
Public Citizen
Maryland Center on Economic Policy
DemCast USA
Fair Elections Center
Human Rights Campaign
Hip Hop Caucus
LatinoJustice PRLDEF
Asian and Pacific Islander American Vote
(APIAVote)
Demos
Allen AME Church
DoTheMostGood
Center for Popular Democracy
Cedar Lane Environmental Justice Ministry
Council on American-Islamic Relations
Stand Up America
The Talking Drum Incorporated