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**Committee:** Education, Energy, and the Environment  
**Testimony on:** SB 342 Voting Rights Act of 2025 – Counties and Municipalities  
**Position:** Favorable  
**Hearing Date:** February 26, 2025

The Maryland Chapter of the Sierra Club urges a favorable report on SB 342. The bill will add protection in Maryland law to prevent suppression or dilution of the votes of citizens who are in racial, color, or language minority groups.

The Sierra Club and its members care about both the natural and human environments, including ending racial and social injustice. As a grassroots environmental advocacy group, the Sierra Club firmly believes that all eligible voters should have an equal opportunity to participate effectively, without being subjected to procedures or systems that suppress or dilute their votes.

The federal Voting Rights Act, passed in 1965, included significant provisions to prevent suppression or dilution of the votes of citizens who are in racial, color, or language minority groups. Unfortunately, some of those provisions have been weakened by Supreme Court decisions in recent years, the current national administration is reducing enforcement, and the Congress is considering legislation that will undermine the progress made under the 1965 Act.

One way votes of a substantial minority group can sometimes be diluted is when members of a county or municipal legislative body are required to live in and represent districts, but all voters in the county or municipality are allowed to vote for all the district members. This was determined recently by federal courts to be diluting Black citizens' votes in the Town of Federalsburg on Maryland's Eastern Shore; the remedy was to change to having town council members who represent a specific district be elected by just the voters within their district instead of by all voters in the town.<sup>1</sup>

The states of California, Connecticut, Minnesota, New York, Oregon, Virginia, and Washington have worked to fill the current and anticipated gaps in federal Voting Rights Act protection by passing their own state voting rights laws. This bill gives Maryland the opportunity to provide similar protections to its citizens.

For those reasons, we urge a favorable report on SB 342.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-va/2024/04/04/federalsburg-lawsuit-voting-rights-naacp-apology/>