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SB0342

February 26, 2025

**TO:** Members of the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee  
**FROM:** Nina Themelis, Director of Mayor's Office of Government Relations  
**RE:** Senate Bill 342 - Voting Rights Act of 2025 - Counties and Municipalities

**POSITION: Support**

Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and Members of the Committee, please be advised that the Baltimore City Administration (BCA) respectfully requests a **favorable** committee report on Senate Bill (SB) 342.

SB 342 enshrines legal protections that protects members of a protected class by preventing their voting rights from being abridged or diluted. This legislation establishes these protections only in county or municipal elections in which there is polarized voting. The bill also establishes the procedure for proving polarized voting and for enforcement of the legal protections. This legislation is an important component of voting rights expansion, as it will codify a necessary recourse for marginalized and historically underrepresented voters who have had their voting power marginalized through discrimination and suppression.

As voter suppression laws surge across the nation, SB 342 would safeguard against any efforts of voter suppression in Maryland. According to the Brennan Center for Justice, at least 30 states have enacted 79 laws that restrict access to voting since 2020. More commonly, these laws limit mail-in voting or require identification to vote. The objective of these laws is to make voting more difficult and reduce voter turnout. This method of voter suppression (be it intentionally or unintentionally) has been demonstrated to have racially disparate impacts for Black and Hispanic voters at the county level, which is supported by a study presented at the 2018 Election Sciences, Reform, and Administration conference at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.<sup>1</sup> Gerrymandering, the process of redrawing district lines to manufacture desired voting demographics or outcomes, is another form of voter suppression that is addressed through this bill. Gerrymandering works through two methods: *cracking*, or splitting up voters of similar interest across multiple districts to mitigate their collective voting power, and *packing*, or skewing districts to encompass voters of dissimilar interests that are not geographically close to dilute the voting power of a specific demographic. In the event that either of these methods are utilized to abridge the voting power of a protected group, SB 342 would ensure that the affected voters have recourse to a free and fair election in the State of Maryland.

As a result of Baltimore City's commitment to improving the equity of historically marginalized and underrepresented communities in the state, the Baltimore City Administration respectfully requests a **favorable** committee report on Senate Bill 342.

<sup>1</sup> Kuk, J., Hajnal, Z., & Lajevardi, N. (2020). A disproportionate burden: strict voter identification laws and minority turnout. *Politics, Groups, and Identities*, 10(1), 126–134. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21565503.2020.1773280>