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February 26, 2025

**SUPPORT: SB 685 - Election Law - Local Boards of Elections -  
Language-Related Assistance**

Mr. Chair and Members of the Committee:

Maryland LCV is submitting this testimony to support SB 685 - Election Law - Local Boards of Elections - Language-Related Assistance. We thank Senator Augustine for his leadership on this issue. Maryland cannot have a healthy environment without an engaged and active democracy, and that begins with lowering the barriers at the ballot box.

Section 203 of the federal Voting Rights Act requires that counties provide election materials to specific language minority groups that include at least 10,000 citizens of voting age or 5% voting age population in that county. **Under current law, only Montgomery and Prince George's County are required to translate to Spanish.**

SB 685 would change the language threshold to 2% or 4,000 citizens of voting age in a county, creating more accessible elections that ensure all citizens are able to be more fully informed voters, regardless of their English proficiency. Once the State Board of Election has determined the languages meeting this threshold, the legislation requires translation of all election related materials, excluding ballots, and establishes a process for ensuring the accuracy of the translations. It also encourages recruitment of election judges who speak the languages meeting the threshold in each jurisdiction.

SB 685 provides more access for limited English proficiency voters by expanding election-related language assistance in the parts of Maryland where it is not already required by federal law and in languages not already covered by such federal protections.

According to the most recent census data, more than 425,000 Maryland residents statewide have limited English proficiency. We can and should do more to improve language access for our communities and make voting easier for populations speaking non-English languages. **Nearly four in five Maryland voters (79%) agree and support expanding language assistance for voters with a limited understanding of English.**

Uninhibited access to the ballot is at the core of a representative democracy. Language assistance, along with the other Maryland Voting Rights Act package bills, will help ensure no eligible voter in the state is left behind at the ballot box. Maryland LCV strongly urges a favorable report on this important bill.