



**Maryland House of Delegates
Ways & Means Committee
February 24, 2025
Submitted February 20, 2025
HB 1043(FAV)**

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of HB 1043, which prohibits voter suppression and vote dilution as part of the Maryland Voting Rights Act of 2025. Fair Elections Center is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to removing barriers to registration and voting through advocacy and impact litigation.

Although Maryland law features important pro-voter policies, it contains no protection against racial vote dilution. Racial vote dilution occurs when electoral practices, such as at-large elections or unfair district maps, weaken the voting strength of voters of color, effectively denying them meaningful political representation. While Section 2 of the federal Voting Rights Act of 1965 has a long history of combatting racial vote dilution and voter suppression, its protections have been weakened in recent years by the federal courts. In HB 1043, Maryland has the opportunity to build on the protections provided in the federal VRA by implementing streamlined standards and procedures that both protect the freedom to vote and make this type of litigation less time-intensive and costly than litigation under the federal VRA.

In addition to protecting access to the ballot box, prohibiting vote dilution helps create a more inclusive and accountable democracy. When voters of color are systematically prevented from electing their preferred candidates, entire communities are left without a voice in decisions that directly impact their lives. Combatting vote dilution is a necessary step toward making the vision of a government that is truly of, by, and for the people a reality.

Importantly, HB 1043 also offers protections against voter suppression, which is the use of standards, policies, and practices that deny or abridge the right to vote, such as disproportionately closing polling places in communities of color. In addition, HB 1043 features a pre-suit notice process that encourages collaboration between parties to remedy potential violations before resorting to litigation, which ultimately saves time and money for everyone involved.

Protections against vote dilution and voter suppression, along with the rest of the Maryland Voting Rights Act package, will help ensure no eligible Marylander is left behind at the ballot box. Fair Elections Center urges swift passage of this bill. If you would like further information, please feel free to contact Michelle Kanter Cohen, Policy Director and Senior Counsel at Fair Elections Center, at mkantercohen@fairelectionscenter.org.