



## **TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE**

### **HB 1043 Maryland Voting Rights Act of 2025 - Voter Suppression and Vote Dilution**

#### **POSITION – Support**

**BY: Linda T. Kohn, President**

**Date: February 24, 2025**

The League of Women Voters of Maryland believes that voters should be able to choose candidates and elected officials who represent the sentiments of their community. They should also be able to ensure that minority views can be heard. Voters should not be limited to who is elected based on practices designed to divide communities. Maryland is well known for its pro-voter laws and voting methods; however, certain dilution practices prevent voters from fully engaging in the democratic process and electing those who would serve them best.

HB 1043 seeks to address critical issues that Maryland has been facing in regard to racial vote dilution. This would allow communities who believe that they are being unfairly split the ability to seek remedies and ultimately vote for a person who they believe represents them. In Baltimore County, this was mainly seen in 2022 when, even though the ability was there, it took a lawsuit and public pressure for the county to recognize that it was purposefully diluting the voting power of the Black community by not drawing a map with two minority-majority districts. HB 1043 would give guidance on how to not only avoid that but also how to remedy it should it occur again.

Furthermore, HB 1043 would give litigators the guidance they need to sue if issues arise again regarding vote dilution. According to the attorneys who represented several Maryland organizations during the Baltimore County redistricting fight, although it was obvious that the maps still did not comply with the federal Voting Rights Act, there was legal precedent to ensure that there was a remedy.<sup>1</sup> HB 1043 would give guidance not only to those suing but also to the courts on how a violation must be rectified.

HB 1043 would also address voter suppression in historically disenfranchised communities. This can be seen when polling places are repeatedly opened late or closed early, consistently run out of ballots, or bar voters from entering. It is critical that those in power do not chalk this up to human errors but recognize that patterns can and

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<https://marylandmatters.org/2022/03/10/in-baltimore-county-redistricting-case-plaintiffs-say-new-council-map-doesnt-comply-with-voting-rights-act/>



have emerged and that only specific communities are being affected by these instances.

Beyond all of these reasons, HB 1043 also provides for a pre-suit pathway for jurisdictions and affected parties to communicate and fix problems before a lawsuit is ever filed. This means that those communities have the ability to work directly with their leaders to work out the best possible solution for them. If a lawsuit becomes necessary, HB 1043 would allow organizations to file suit on behalf of individuals as well as communities. This means that those who do not have the financial ability to gain access to the ballot box can rely on their community groups to do so.

With the ongoing uncertainty and dismantling surrounding the federal Voting Rights Act of 1965, Maryland is called to begin setting up protections now and not when it's too late.

LWVMD urges a favorable report on HB 1043