



Council on American-Islamic Relations

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February 24, 2025

Honorable Chair Vanessa Atterbeary
House Ways and Means Committee
130 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: Testimony Favorable for HB 1043 Maryland Voting Rights Act of 2025

Dear Chair Atterbeary and Members of the House Ways and Means Committee:

On behalf of the Maryland office of the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), I thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 1043 Maryland Voting Rights Act of 2025. CAIR is America's largest Muslim civil rights and advocacy organization.

Similarly to the ACLU, CAIR is concerned that the Trump administration's second term might renew efforts to erode the constitutional foundations of democracy, making it more challenging for Americans—especially voters of color, individuals with limited English proficiency, voters with disabilities, and other marginalized groups—to exercise their right to vote.

This is an objective of Project 2025, an initiative led by The Heritage Foundation, in collaboration with other conservative organizations, aiming to prepare for a potential conservative administration by developing a comprehensive policy agenda and staffing strategy. The project outlines plans to restructure federal agencies and implement policies reflecting a conservative ideology.

This stands to substantially impact voting rights. Critics argue that the initiative proposes measures that could undermine democratic processes and restrict access to voting, particularly for marginalized communities. For instance, the project includes proposals to:

- **Politicize Independent Institutions:** By embedding ideologically driven individuals into nonpartisan civil service positions, there is a risk of eroding the impartiality of institutions that oversee elections.
- **Implement Restrictive Voting Laws:** Advocates of Project 2025 have supported legislation like the Safeguard American Voter Eligibility (SAVE) Act, which mandates in-person proof of citizenship for voter registration. Voting rights experts warn that such requirements could disenfranchise eligible voters, including married women who have changed their names, people of color and young voters.
- **Diminish Federal Oversight:** The project suggests reducing the authority of the Department of Justice in enforcing voting rights protections, potentially leading to a rollback of safeguards established since the civil rights movement.

Some elements of this are already at play on a federal level, meaning it outlines a framework that could significantly alter the landscape of federal governance and voting rights. If implemented, these proposals may lead to increased barriers to voting and a potential rollback of decades-long progress in civil rights protections.

House bill 1043 is designed to protect voting rights by making sure that:

- **Advance Notice:** State and local election officials must give clear, public notice well ahead of time (typically at least 15 days before a meeting, or 48 hours during early voting) if they plan to change any

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policies that affect voting. This includes things like voter registration, voting methods, or the location of polling places.

- **Preventing Discrimination:** Local governments and election bodies are forbidden from adopting policies or taking actions that create a significant disadvantage or reduce the voting power of minority groups (protected classes). This means they cannot change voting methods, district boundaries, or other procedures if it's likely to dilute the votes of these groups.
- **Legal Recourse and Remedies:** If someone believes a change is discriminatory or suppresses voting, they can sue the local government. The court can then order remedies to fix the issue—such as changing how elections are run, adding more polling locations, or even switching to different methods of voting to ensure fair participation.
- **Streamlined Process:** The bill outlines clear definitions, procedures, and timelines for both the announcement of changes and for legal challenges, ensuring that any disputes can be resolved quickly, especially if an upcoming election is affected.

In short, the bill aims to make election changes transparent, protect voters from unfair practices, and provide a way to quickly address any violations of these voting rights.

Therefore, CAIR urges a favorable report. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

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