

January 27, 2026

Testimony on SB 255
Voting Rights Act of 2025 – Counties and Municipalities
Education, Energy, and the Environment

Position: Favorable

Common Cause Maryland supports SB 255, which codifies a new prohibition against vote dilution into Maryland state law. The protections provided in this bill are essential to ensure that all Marylanders, particularly those from historically disenfranchised communities, have an equal opportunity to elect the representatives of their choice.

For over sixty years, the federal Voting Rights Act (VRA) of 1965 served as the nation’s most effective tool for tackling discriminatory voting practices. At its height, Section 2 of the federal VRA addressed the long history of discrimination in voting by prohibiting racial vote dilution and voter suppression. However, federal courts, including the U.S. Supreme Court, have severely limited the federal VRA’s protections through cases like *Shelby County v. Holder* (2013) and *Brnovich v. DNC* (2021).

Meanwhile, the federal government is not only failing to protect against intimidation and discrimination in our voting processes but is instead actively advancing anti-voter policies. At a time when federal voting rights protections have been weakened and enforcement has become increasingly uncertain, Maryland legislators have both the authority and the responsibility to safeguard fair and equal access to the ballot in our state.

Maryland has a generally progressive reputation nationally. However, Maryland law currently contains no protection against racial vote dilution, and recent challenges to racially dilutive voting systems in Federalsburg and Baltimore County underscore the crucial need for these kinds of protections in our state. SB 255 builds on the protections provided in the federal VRA by implementing streamlined standards and procedures designed to 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.

SB 255 strengthens Maryland’s democratic institutions, honors the legacy of the federal Voting Rights Act, and helps ensure that every eligible voter has the equal opportunity to participate in choosing who represents them within their local government. Strong protections against vote dilution will help ensure no eligible voter in Maryland is left behind at the ballot box. For these reasons, we urge a favorable report on SB 255.