

Subject: Voting Rights Act of 2026-Counties and Municipal Corporations SB 255 – Senate Education, Energy, and Environmental Committee HB 350 –House Government, Labor, Elections Committee

Testimony Senate & House Bill – Favorable

January 27, 2026

Dear Honorable Senate Sydnor and Members of the Committee, and Delegates of the House Committee,

Thank you for introducing and sponsoring SB 255/HB 350, the Voting Rights Act of 2026 – Counties and Municipal Corporations. My name is Kendra Westervelt and I am a resident of Clarksburg, Maryland, District 15. I respectfully urge the Committees to issue a favorable report on SB 255/HB 350.

This legislation is critically needed to protect Maryland voters from racial vote dilution, voter suppression, and voter intimidation. Racial vote dilution occurs when electoral practices—such as at-large elections or unfair district maps—diminish the voting strength of communities of color, denying them meaningful political representation. Maryland law currently provides no explicit protection against racial vote dilution, despite recent challenges in Federalsburg and Baltimore County that underscore the urgent need for state-level safeguards.

SB 255/HB 350 builds upon the legacy of the federal Voting Rights Act of 1965 by creating clear, enforceable protections within Maryland. For decades, the federal VRA served as the nation’s most effective tool to combat discriminatory voting practices. However, key provisions have been significantly weakened by court decisions including *Shelby County v. Holder* (2013), *Brnovich v. DNC* (2021), and *Louisiana v. Callais* (2025). As a result, states must now act to protect voters where federal law no longer provides sufficient coverage.

This bill also establishes civil private rights of action against voter intimidation. While criminal prohibitions exist, Maryland voters currently lack civil remedies when they face harassment, threats, deception, or obstruction that interferes with their right to vote. Providing these protections ensures accountability and affirms that every eligible voter can participate freely and safely in our democratic process.

For these reasons, I strongly urge the Committees to return a favorable report on SB 255/HB 350. Passage of this bill will strengthen Maryland’s democratic institutions, protect voters from discrimination and intimidation, and ensure that all Marylanders have an equal opportunity to elect representatives of their choice.

Sincerely,  
Kendra Westervelt