
FAVORABLE TESTIMONY ON SENATE BILL 255

Voting Rights Act of 2026 – Counties and Municipal Corporations

Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

January 27, 2026

My name is Deborah (Debbie) Shulman, and I am a resident of Olney, Maryland for more than 31 years. I strongly urge the Committee to pass Senate Bill 255, which would establish critical protections against racial vote dilution in Maryland.

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 and their communities meaningful political participation. The protections outlined in SB 255 are essential to ensuring that all Marylanders, particularly those from historically disenfranchised communities, have an equal opportunity to elect representatives of their choice.

For more than sixty years, the federal Voting Rights Act of 1965 served as the nation's most effective tool for combating discriminatory voting practices. At its height, Section 2 addressed racial vote dilution and voter suppression, while Section 5 prevented discriminatory practices before they could take effect through federal preclearance. However, these protections have been severely weakened by federal court decisions, including *Shelby County v. Holder* (2013), which dismantled the preclearance system, and *Brnovich v. Democratic National Committee* (2021), which made challenges to discriminatory voter suppression far more difficult. Now, even Section 2's application to redistricting and meaningful representation for communities of color is under threat, as seen in *Louisiana v. Callais* (2025).

At the same time, the federal government has failed to adequately protect voters from intimidation and discrimination and has increasingly advanced anti-voter policies. In this environment, Maryland legislators have both the authority and the responsibility to ensure fair and equal access to the ballot for all residents.

SB 255 responds to this moment by building upon the federal Voting Rights Act with streamlined standards and procedures that protect the freedom to vote while making enforcement less time-intensive and less costly than federal litigation. Currently, Maryland law contains no explicit protection against racial vote dilution. Recent challenges to racially dilutive voting systems in places such as Federalsburg and Baltimore County demonstrate the urgent need for these safeguards at the state level.

Combatting vote dilution is a necessary step toward realizing a government that is truly of, by, and for the people. When voters of color are systematically prevented from electing candidates of their choice, entire communities are excluded from decisions that directly impact their lives.

Prohibiting vote dilution strengthens democratic accountability and promotes a more inclusive and representative democracy.

SB 255 strengthens Maryland's democratic institutions, honors the legacy of the federal Voting Rights Act, and helps ensure that every eligible voter has an equal opportunity to participate in choosing their local representatives. For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to issue a favorable report on Senate Bill 255.

Sincerely,

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