

SB 255/ HB 350

Voting Rights Act of 2026 – Counties and Municipal Corporations

Position: Favorable

January 23, 2026

To the Honorable Chair and Members of the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

My name is Lesley Frost and I am the Chair of National Council of Jewish Women, Maryland State Policy Advocacy Committee (NCJW MD SPA) and I am writing, on behalf of our 700 advocates across the state, to urge the Committee to pass SB 255 to enact protections against racial vote dilution in Maryland.

Vote dilution occurs when electoral practices, such as at-large elections or unfair district maps, weaken the voting strength of voters, particularly voters of color. Such practices effectively deny them and their communities meaningful political participation. The protections outlined in SB 255 will ensure that all Marylanders, particularly those from historically disenfranchised communities, have the equal opportunity to elect representatives of their choice.

As the federal courts have, for the past sixty years, severely limited the federal Voting Rights Act (VRA) of 1965, through cases like *Shelby County v. Holder* (2013), and *Brnovich v. DNC* (2021), and, now Section 2's applicability to the redistricting process and meaningful representation for communities of color is under threat in *Louisiana v. Callais* (2025), it is essential that Maryland legislators use both their authority and their responsibility to safeguard fair and equal access to the ballot.

SB 255 builds on the protections provided in the federal VRA with streamlined standards and procedures designed to both protect the freedom to vote and to make litigation less time-intensive and costly than similar litigation under the federal VRA. 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.

Furthermore, 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 who represents them within their local government.

National Council of Jewish Women opposes voter suppression laws, policies and practices and supports legislation that would renew the protections of the VRA. NCJW MD SPA's support for SB255 is based on the following NCJW Resolution 1V.11

“Election laws, policies, and practices that ensure - without domestic or foreign interference - safe, easy and equitable access to the ballot and eliminate obstacles to the electoral process so that every vote counts and can be verified.”

Therefore we respectfully urge a favorable report on SB 255.

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