

February 11, 2026

Testimony on HB 219
Maryland Voting Rights Act of 2026 – Voter Intimidation and Suppression
Government, Labor, and Elections

Position: Favorable

Common Cause Maryland is in support of HB 219, which would enact protections against voter intimidation, deception and obstruction and voter suppression in Maryland. The protections outlined in HB 219 are essential to ensuring that all Marylanders have the equal opportunity to freely 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 and Section 5 of the federal VRA stopped discriminatory practices before they occurred through preclearance. However, federal courts, including the U.S. Supreme Court, have severely limited the federal VRA’s protections. 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 by passing strong prohibitions against intimidation and suppression.

Despite Maryland’s progressive reputation nationally, voting rights abuses and discriminatory election methods persist within hundreds of our local government entities. Currently, there is no prohibition against suppressive election policies and practices in Maryland law. HB 219 codifies a clear prohibition against voter suppression that will help ensure that all voters – especially those from historically disenfranchised communities who are more likely to experience voter suppression – are protected.

Maryland does currently have a criminal prohibition against voter intimidation, however enforcement of this law depends on the resources of the Maryland Attorney General. We’ve seen instances of intimidation increase since 2020, however the legal tools and resources needed to investigate remain costly and out of reach for many victims. HB 219 helps solve this problem by creating a new streamlined process for handling these instances that allows victims to bring their own cases and seek practical relief while saving all parties - including Maryland taxpayers - valuable time and money.

As voters face misinformation, intimidation, and unequal access to the ballot box, public confidence in our democratic systems continues to erode. Enacting strong prohibitions against voter intimidation and suppression at the state level is a step towards regaining that trust.

Combating these instances when and where they happen is an important and necessary step towards making a vision of the government that is truly of, by, and for the people a reality.

HB 219 strengthens Maryland's democratic institutions, honors the legacy of the federal Voting Rights Act, and ensures that voters are equipped with robust tools to fight voter intimidation and suppressive election practices whenever and wherever they happen. For these reasons, we request a favorable report on HB 219.