



TESTIMONY FOR HB 0219

Maryland Voting Rights Act of 2026 - Voter Intimidation and Suppression

Bill Sponsor: Delegate Smith

Committee: Government, Labor, and Elections

Organization submitting: IndivisibleHoCoMD

Person Submitting: Valerie Fears, Defend Democracy Action Team Member

Position: FAVORABLE

Chair, ViceChair, and Members of the Committee,

I submit this testimony in favor of HB0219 on behalf of Indivisible Howard County, now a 1700+ member organization with various action teams. Our mission as a whole is to strengthen our democracy. The Defend Democracy Team works on issues involving election integrity; civics participation; campaign finance; and ethics and accountability in government.

We have watched with dismay while federal courts have continued to weaken the protections afforded by the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and are now under attack by proposed legislation in the U.S. Congress. We therefore strongly urge the Committee to pass HB 0219, which repeals and reenacts with amendments former Maryland election laws, adding crucial new definitions and provisions, prohibitions, and requirements to safeguard voter rights and provide access and protections for all Maryland voters, including "protected class" voters. New instructions and/or requirements are included to aid local governments, election officials, and courts in interpreting and safeguarding every aspect of voting in our state.

It adds requirements that any material changes to election administration policy must provide advance public notice to sufficiently allow for public comment. It also requires that any statutes, regulations or other legal requirements in our state must be construed liberally in favor of protecting the voting rights of eligible voters so they have confidence that, in Maryland, their right to vote will be protected and their ballots will be counted.

Lastly, HB 0219 adds crucial voter protections which address the very real possibility of threats, obstruction and or other acts of intimidation or assault by bad actors showing up at voter registration locations or at polling locations during elections (or by online or mailed deceptive instructions or voting "information" posing as legitimate Election Board notices). Voter suppression and intimidation have become a very real concern all over the U.S., including in Maryland.

Marylanders value equal opportunity to vote and want to feel safe both when they register to vote and when they are casting their ballots. HB0219 provides those protections.

We respectfully urge a FAVORABLE report.

