

February 2, 2026

Written Testimony on HB350/HB219

Voting Rights Act of 2026 – Counties and Municipal Corporations

**Maryland Voting Rights Act of 2026 - Voter Intimidation and Suppression
Government, Labor, and Elections**

Position: Favorable

My name is Julie A. Rosen, and I submit this written testimony as an individual resident of Montgomery County, Maryland. I implore the Committee to pass both HB350 and HB219 to enact protections against racial vote dilution in Maryland. Racial vote dilution happens 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. Combatting vote dilution is an important and necessary step towards making a vision of a government that is truly of, by, and for the people a reality. The protections outlined in HB350 and HB219 are essential to ensure that all Marylanders have the equal opportunity to elect representatives of their choice; particularly those from historically disenfranchised communities.

I am of a 'certain age' to remember the joy of my elders and neighbors –both Black and Jewish— expressed when the federal Voting Rights Act (VRA) of 1965 was passed. For over 60 years it has 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. Today as an elder myself, I now look upon the decisions of federal courts, including the U.S. Supreme Court, which severely limit the federal VRA's protections through cases like *Shelby County v. Holder* (2013), which gutted the coverage formula in the preclearance program, and *Brnovich v. DNC* (2021), which made it difficult—if not impossible—to challenge discriminatory voter suppression. Now, it's the final 'leg of lawful strength,' Section 2's applicability to the redistricting process and meaningful representation for communities of color that is under threat in *Louisiana v. Callais* (2025).

Meanwhile, the federal government is not only failing to protect against intimidation and discrimination in our voting processes, but is actively advancing anti-voter policies. 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.

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. I believe HB350/HB219 meets this perilous moment by building on the protections provided in the federal VRA's 'high bar' with streamlined standards and procedures designed to both protect the freedom to vote and to make this type of litigation less time-intensive and costly than similar litigation under the federal VRA. Therefore, I respectfully urge a favorable report on HB350 and HB219.