

February 11, 2026

Maryland House Government, Labor, and Elections Committee  
142-145 Lowe House Office Building  
6 Bladen St., Annapolis, Maryland 21401-1991

**Statement of Support for S.B. 255 / H.B. 350 and H.B. 219, the Maryland Voting Rights Act**

Dear Committee Members,

As a broad coalition of civil rights, community, faith, labor, and civic organizations, we urge you to prioritize and pass **S.B. 255 / H.B.350 and H.B. 219**, key pieces of the Maryland Voting Rights Act (MDVRA). In the last year, we have seen unprecedented and grave threats to voting rights and democracy nationally. In 2026 and beyond, the best way we can fight back against these attacks is to enact the MDVRA.

Recent polling shows that the MDVRA and each of its provisions are extremely popular among Maryland voters across race and party lines. Notably, 81% of Maryland voters [support an MDVRA](#), and 80% would like their state representative to prioritize its passage. This overwhelming support shows that creating a fair, inclusive democracy is a core Maryland value—and that the MDVRA is both good policy and the will of the people.

Across the country, we are witnessing an alarming rollback of core democratic protections. The federal Voting Rights Act of 1965 (VRA)—once the nation’s strongest safeguard against racial discrimination in voting—has been severely weakened by decades of damaging court decisions. The U.S. Supreme Court’s recent rulings in *Shelby County v. Holder* (2013) and *Brnovich v. Democratic National Committee* (2021) have stripped away essential federal oversight and made it extremely difficult for voters to challenge discriminatory practices. Moreover, the Supreme Court is now considering two major cases that could severely limit what’s left of the federal VRA. Together, these cases could strip away our last effective tools for fighting racial discrimination in voting.

Recent vote dilution challenges brought against Baltimore County and Federalsburg underscore persistent barriers to the ballot box, such as unfair districts or at-large systems that weaken Black voters’ electoral power. Although the challenges were successful in those cases, victories came only after costly, protracted legal battles that the MDVRA would help prevent. And if the Supreme Court sides with opponents of the federal VRA, such victories will be totally out of reach in Maryland without the MDVRA.

Immediate state legislative action is now essential. We cannot wait for Congress to restore what has been lost—it must act now to defend the freedom to vote for all Marylanders.

As currently proposed, the MDVRA makes Maryland's democracy more inclusive by:

- Enshrining robust protections against discriminatory vote dilution and voter suppression into state law;
- Creating strong protections against voter intimidation, deception, and obstruction; and
- Expanding language assistance in elections for voters with limited English proficiency.

Last session, the Language Access portion of the MDVRA was enacted. This session, we urge the Maryland legislature to pass the vote dilution, voter intimidation, and vote suppression provisions of the MDVRA.

### **S.B. 255 / H.B. 350 - Combating Racial Vote Dilution**

We urge you to pass S.B. 255 / H.B. 350 to enact robust protections against discriminatory election systems that drown out the voices of color and deny them equal power to elect their preferred representatives, known as racial vote dilution. In building on Section 2 of the federal Voting Rights Act, this legislation benefits both voters and local governments in Maryland by providing an efficient framework to cost-effectively and holistically eliminate racial vote dilution.

Last session, these critical provisions gained considerable traction when they passed out of the Senate. This session, they must be prioritized and become state law to protect our democracy and voters of color in Maryland.

### **H.B. 219 - Combating Voter Intimidation and Suppression**

We urge you to pass H.B. 219 to create a civil private right of action against voter intimidation to ensure that all Marylanders can participate in the political process free from harassment, intimidation, or threats of violence. Even though criminal prohibitions exist, civil protections are not currently available under Maryland law. By supplementing existing criminal prohibitions, H.B. 219 gives impacted voters the right to sue a person or group engaging in these acts. Protections like these are needed by Maryland voters who continue to face serious challenges, such as those at polling locations in [Montgomery County](#) in 2020 and [Frederick County](#) in 2024.

H.B. 219 would also protect against barriers that deny voting opportunities in a way that is efficient and cost-effective for both voters and local governments within the state. It builds upon the federal VRA by providing a clearer and more efficient framework for eliminating discriminatory barriers to the ballot, known as vote suppression. This provision will ensure that voters or the attorney general can hold jurisdictions accountable for maintaining

practices that suppress turnout in historically disenfranchised communities, such as inaccessible polling locations; inadequate voting hours; off-cycle election dates; wrongful voter purges; and staggered elections, among others.

If enacted, these two pieces of legislation would immediately position the Free State as a leader in protecting the right to vote and standing up to national threats against free and fair elections.

The MDVRA builds upon successful state VRAs that have already passed in Virginia, Connecticut, New York, Colorado, Minnesota, Washington, Oregon, and California. Similar bills are also actively under consideration in New Jersey and Delaware. As one of the nation's most diverse states, Maryland's democracy should reflect that in every aspect of the electoral process.

Now is Maryland's time to lead. We encourage you to prioritize, pass, and fully fund the MDVRA this legislative session, and we stand ready to work with you to secure this victory for all Maryland voters.

Sincerely,

## **Organizations**

### Based in Maryland

Advance Maryland  
AFSCME Maryland Council 3  
American Civil Liberties Union of Maryland  
Baltimore Renters United  
Baltimore-Washington Conference of The United Methodist Church  
Black Girls Vote  
CAIR Maryland  
Common Cause Maryland  
Community Action Network for Democracy, Liberties and Equality (CANDLE)  
Gibson-Banks Center for Race and the Law,  
University of Maryland Francis King Carey School of Law  
Indivisible Bowie and Beyond (IBBMD)  
Indivisible Calvert County  
Indivisible Cambridge  
Indivisible Catonsville

## **Maryland Voters**

### District 3

Tatiana Santos

### District 5

Fay Dorsett  
Mindy Meyer  
Megan Grogard  
Teresa Tidwell

### District 7

Bonnie T.  
Jane Beard  
Jean Rasenberger

### District 8

Carliss Maddox

### District 10

Nehemiah Bester

### District 14

Indivisible Central Maryland  
Indivisible Eastern Shore  
Indivisible Frederick MD  
Indivisible Frederick Forward  
Indivisible Howard County  
Indivisible Maryland Coalition  
Indivisible Montgomery County  
Indivisible SMCMD  
Jews United for Justice  
League of Women Voters of Maryland  
Maryland League of Conservation Voters  
National Council of Jewish Women, Maryland  
No Boundaries Coalition - 40th district, 21217  
North Woodside Civil Resistance  
Out for Justice  
Progressive Maryland  
Ranked Choice Voting Maryland  
SEIU 1199  
SEIU Local 500  
St. Mary's County NAACP  
The Talking Drum Incorporated  
Third Act Maryland  
UNITE HERE Local 7

National Partners

Asian American Legal Defense & Education Fund  
Asian and Pacific Islander American Vote (APIAVote)  
Black Voters Matter Fund  
Campaign Legal Center  
Declaration for American Democracy Coalition  
Demos  
Fair Elections Center  
FairVote  
Indivisible CT Shoreline  
Institute for Responsive Government Action  
LatinoJustice PRLDEF  
Life After Release  
Lugenia Burns Hope Center  
NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF)  
Power Coalition for Equity and Justice (PCEJ)  
Public Citizen

Lindsay Mallick

District 15

Alexandra Estes  
Ann Connor  
Annie O'Connell DeMeo  
Kim Westervelt  
Taina Litwak

District 16

Julie A. Rosen, PhD  
Meena Thermaratnam  
Prabhat Garg  
Shubhra Garg

District 17

Andrew Sutton  
Carolyn Levine

District 18

Christine Stover  
Kavita Sethi  
Mary Sing

District 27

Ann Scharpf  
Anne Meere Abner  
Brigit Sharp  
Frank McPhillips  
Janet Ashby  
Katharine Stewart  
Kathryn R. Staford  
Kristin Kerns-D'Amore  
Maria Cosmas-Monnet  
Maria Dorsett  
Patricia Eleazar  
Patricia M. Weaver  
Peggy Murphy  
Ruth Ticktin  
Sandra Raviv  
Sandra VanOosten  
Susan Brayford  
Susan Alexander  
Trina Beal

District 28

Rebecca M. Turner

Public Justice Center, Inc.  
Protect Democracy United  
Secure Elections Network  
The Center for Election Science

District 29

Audra Howard  
Marcia Greenberg  
Marcia Coe  
Mary McDougal  
Molly Shipley

District 30

Emily Manders  
Jeannie Egan  
Joan Slettvet  
Joy R. Crosser  
Louis de Merode  
Merianne de Merode  
Sharon Hensley

District 31

Michelle Koul

District 37

Jill Penaloza

District 40

Khalilah M. Harris

District 46

Julie Solomon