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TESTIMONY FOR HB0350
Voting Rights Act of 2026 - Counties and Municipal Corporations

Bill Sponsor: Delegates Wims, Behler, Boyce et al
Committee: Government, Labor and Elections
Organization Submitting: Indivisible Bowie and Beyond (IBBMD)
Person Submitting: Liz Enagonio, co-founder
Position: FAVORABLE

I am submitting this testimony **in favor of HB0350** on behalf of Indivisible Bowie and Beyond (IBBMD). IBBMD is a group of several hundred grassroots activists in Bowie and surrounding areas in Prince George's County, working to bring justice, equality, and people-centric legislation to Maryland.

IBBMD strongly urges the Committee to **pass HB0350 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. The protections outlined in SB 255 are essential to ensuring that all Marylanders, particularly those from historically disenfranchised communities, have the equal opportunity to elect representatives of their choice. 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.

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. However, over the past 10-15 years, federal courts, including the U.S. Supreme Court, have severely limited 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. 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).

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.**

HB0350 would build on the protections provided in the federal VRA through streamlined standards and procedures designed to both protect the freedom to vote and to make litigation less time-intensive and costly than litigating 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.

In the interest of fair and just voting access for communities of color in Maryland, IBBMD urges that you support HB0350 and recommend a **FAVORABLE** report in committee.