

February 9, 2026

Testimony on HB 350

Voting Rights Act of 2026 – Counties and Municipal Corporations

Government, Labor, and Elections Committee

Position: Favorable

As a constituent of St. Mary's County, Maryland, I strongly urge the Committee to vote favorably on HB 350 to insure protections against racial vote dilution in Maryland. The protections outlined in HB 350 are essential to ensuring that all Marylanders, particularly those from historically disenfranchised communities, have the equal opportunity to elect 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. However, federal courts, including the U.S. Supreme Court, have severely limited the federal VRA's protections. Currently Section 2's applicability to the redistricting process and meaningful representation for communities of color is under threat in *Louisiana v. Callais* (2025).

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.

HB 350 meets this perilous moment by building on the protections provided in the federal VRA 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. 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.

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. When voters of color are systematically prevented from electing the candidates of their choice, entire communities are left without a voice in decisions that directly impact their lives.

HB 350 strengthens Maryland's democratic institutions, honors the legacy of the federal Voting Rights Act, and helps ensure that every eligible voter has an equal opportunity to

participate in choosing who represents them within their local government. For these reasons, I ask for your endorsement of a favorable report on HB 350.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

James Brendan Murphy

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