



Regarding House Bill 219 – Favorable  
Submitted by Birgit Sharp, 2/9/2026

This testimony is being submitted on behalf of CANDLE<sup>1</sup> in support of House Bill 219. This bill is a necessary safeguard for Maryland voters. By strengthening protections against voter intimidation and suppression and providing a civil remedy, House Bill 219 helps ensure that eligible Marylanders can participate in elections free from coercion, threats, harassment, or discriminatory barriers.

Since January 2025 national actions have increased concerns about voter access and election administration:

- Jan. 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2025 - The Justice Department ordered a freeze on all new civil rights cases.<sup>2</sup>
- March 25<sup>th</sup>, 2025 – The Protecting the Integrity of American Elections executive order requires documentation of citizenship to register to vote, decertification of certain voting machines and penalizing states for accepting mail-in votes after the election date<sup>3</sup> (In December the US Postal Service stopped putting dates on postmarks).<sup>4</sup>
- May 2025 - The Justice Department demanded full, unredacted voter rolls, and in September they starting suing states that are not cooperating.<sup>5</sup>
- June 2025 - The Administration urged Texas to redistrict its legislative boundaries to benefit Republicans.<sup>6</sup>
- Most recently the FBI seized ballots and other voting records in Fulton County, Georgia.<sup>7</sup>

While many of these actions are being challenged, they reflect a broader environment in which voting access and election integrity are being undermined.

At the same time, aggressive immigration enforcement actions have created fear in communities and actively serve to discourage eligible voters from participating. Clear, enforceable protections against intimidation and suppression are therefore essential.

HB 219 advances that goal. It creates a civil private right of action against voter intimidation and suppression. This helps ensure that all Marylanders can participate in the political process free from harassment, intimidation, or threats of violence. And it helps remove barriers that deny equal voting opportunities, holding jurisdictions accountable for maintaining practices that suppress turnout in historically disenfranchised communities. The bill also protects against voter deception and obstruction.

In the current climate of voter intimidation and suppression, maintaining free and fair elections requires proactive legislative efforts. We must join with the other nine<sup>8</sup> states who have enacted VRAs in preserving one of our most fundamental democratic rights – the right to use our voice through the voting process. We respectfully request that you issue a favorable report.

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*Far better to light the candle, than to curse the darkness.*

- 1) CANDLE is the Community Action Network for Democracy, Liberties and Equality, based in Anne Arundel and Calvert Counties. Our membership is close to 150 people.
- 2) Just Security: “The Trump Administration’s Dismissal of Voting Rights Lawsuits”  
<https://www.justsecurity.org/113745/wjh-trump-dismissal-voting-rights-lawsuits/>
- 3) The Brennan Center for Justice: “[Explainer-The President’s Executive Order on Elections](https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/presidents-executive-order-elections-explained)”  
<https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/presidents-executive-order-elections-explained>
- 4) The Brookings Institute: “When a Postmark No Longer Tracks Mailing”  
<https://www.brookings.edu/articles/when-a-postmark-no-longer-tracks-mailing/>
- 5) The Brennan Center for Justice: “Trump Administration Has Sued More than 20 States for Refusing to Turn Over Voter Files” <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/analysis-opinion/trump-administration-has-sued-more-20-states-refusing-turn-over-voter>
- 6) NPR: “Texas passes midterm redistricting sought by Trump as California plans to counter”  
<https://www.npr.org/2025/08/21/nx-s1-5496659/texas-congressional-redistricting-trump>
- 7) ABC News: “FBI seizes 2020 ballots in Georgia in apparently unprecedented action, alarming local officials” <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/fbi-conducting-court-ordered-activity-georgia-election-site/story?id=129644345>
- 8) NCSL (National Conference of State Legislatures) “State Voting Rights Acts”  
<https://www.ncsl.org/elections-and-campaigns/state-voting-rights-acts>