

**HB 0350**

**Voting Rights Act of 2026 – Counties and Municipal Corporations**

**Government, Labor, and Elections Committee**

**Position: Favorable**

Chair, Vice Chair, and members,

St. Mary's County NAACP, Rose Frederick, Prior 1<sup>st</sup> Vice President/Secretary

The St. Mary's County NAACP strongly urges the Committee to pass HB0350 to enact protections against racial vote dilution in Maryland. The protections outlined in HB0350 are essential to ensuring that all Marylanders, including St. Mary's County with an historically disenfranchised community, have the equal opportunity to elect representatives of their choice.

St. Mary's County's population is made up of about 26% persons of color and not one person elected to office represents that population due to a very flawed system of voting. Due to the current elections system for County Commissioner, persons of color voices are silenced and discouraged from voting and running for office. Deceased County Commissioner, John Lancaster, the first African American County Commissioner for St. Mary's County was elected to office in 1986 and reelected to a second term in 1990. Since that time, there has not been a person of color as a St. Mary's County Commissioner in office. The reason is not because no one has run, there have been several people of color who have run, including myself. During my campaign I was told by persons of color that they did not vote because nothing would change and that the same persons would win, not a person of their choice or a person of color in St. Mary's County. The current system allows for elected officials to be voted in office by the entire county, but they do not represent the entire county, only certain blocks of the county. If County Commissioners were voted in office by their district, rather than the county, then that district would have a voice and the Commissioner would be held accountable, not as the current system where there is no accountability. Not having an elected individual champion for their district needs and being held accountable discourages voting and people from running for office. It is up to this committee to prevent voters from feeling that their vote don't count.

Please, put a stop to silencing the voices of St. Mary's County Communities. This undemocratic way of voting leave voters unrepresented in the local government within each election cycle. If further evidence is needed, you need look no further than the Voting Rights Act of 1965, Section 2 of the federal Voting Rights Act which addresses the long history of discrimination in voting by voter suppression and Section 5 of the Federal Voting Rights Act which stopped discriminatory practices.

Delegates, you can make a change now.

In closing, I am asking for a favorable report. Thank you