

February 9, 2026

The Honorable Melissa Wells

Chair, Government, Labor, and Elections Committee

145 Lowe House Office Building

Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: Support for HB 350, Voting Rights Act of 2026, Counties and Municipal Corporations

Dear Chair Wells,

Maryland Latinos Unidos (MLU) is honored to express our strong support for House Bill 350, Voting Rights Act of 2026, Counties and Municipal Corporations, which is scheduled for a hearing on February 11, 2026 at 2:00 p.m. in the House Government, Labor, and Elections Committee.

HB 350 establishes a state level prohibition against election methods in county and municipal elections that impair the ability of members of a protected class to elect candidates of their choice or to influence the outcome of an election due to vote dilution or abridgement of rights. This is a structural voting rights measure that focuses on how election systems are designed and applied, not only on individual acts. It recognizes that fair representation can be undermined even when the act of casting a ballot is technically available, particularly in local systems where at large elections or district lines can weaken the voting power of concentrated communities.

The bill is also designated as an emergency measure with an effective date upon enactment, reflecting urgency in addressing local election equity. Its policy purpose aligns with the broader Maryland Voting Rights Act framework advanced by civil rights advocates, who emphasize that discrimination can persist in local representation even in diverse states and that state standards can provide clearer protections for voters of color and language minority communities.

Implications for Latino and immigrant Marylanders

Latino Marylanders are building political power in local jurisdictions where decisions about zoning, housing, schools, and policing are made. Ensuring that local election structures do not dilute the voting strength of language minority communities is essential for equitable resource allocation and responsive governance. HB 350 expands opportunity by strengthening fair representation at the local level and by giving communities tools to challenge systems that suppress their collective voice. MLU can amplify these outcomes by partnering with civic organizations to educate residents about local election systems, support community engagement in municipal elections, and collaborate with allies to monitor implementation so the bill's protections translate into real representation.

MLU urges the Government, Labor, and Elections Committee to issue a favorable report on HB 350.

Sincerely,

Carlos Orbe, Jr.

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