

February 11, 2026

**Testimony on HB 350
Voting Rights Act of 2026 – Counties and Municipal Corporations
Government, Labor, and Elections Committee**

Position: Favorable

As a resident of St. Mary's County, a candidate for local office, and someone who was born and spent part of my childhood in Lexington Park, I respectfully urge the Committee to issue a favorable report on HB 350 to ensure meaningful protections against racial vote dilution in Maryland. The safeguards contained in HB 350 are essential to guaranteeing that all Marylanders, particularly those from historically disenfranchised communities, have an equal opportunity to elect representatives of their choice.

In my district, Lexington Park voters are typically outvoted under countywide, at-large election systems that reflect more conservative voting patterns elsewhere in St. Mary's County. Although Lexington Park is one of the county's most diverse communities and reliably votes Democratic, its residents' voices are routinely drowned out. This lived reality, which I have witnessed both as a community member and as a candidate, illustrates how vote dilution undermines fair representation.

As a white man, I do not claim to speak for the Black community. However, living and organizing in a community where Black residents make up a significant portion of the population has made clear the strain that chronic underrepresentation places on neighborhoods and local trust in government. When communities of color are repeatedly prevented from electing candidates of their choice, real needs go unmet.

For more than sixty years, the federal Voting Rights Act (VRA) of 1965 served as the nation's most effective tool for combating discriminatory voting practices. Today, however, its protections have been weakened by federal court decisions, and Section 2's application to redistricting and meaningful representation for communities of color is currently under threat in *Louisiana v. Callais* (2025).

At the same time, the federal government has failed to adequately protect against voter intimidation and discrimination and has advanced policies that restrict access to the ballot. As federal enforcement grows increasingly uncertain, Maryland legislators have both the authority and the responsibility to act.

HB 350 meets this moment by strengthening and modernizing voting rights protections at the state level. It builds upon the federal VRA with clearer standards and more efficient procedures, making enforcement more accessible and less costly. Maryland law currently provides no explicit protection against racial vote dilution, and recent challenges in Federalsburg, where Black residents make up 47 percent of the population yet no Black person has ever been elected to municipal office, as well as in Baltimore County, highlight the urgent need for these safeguards.

Combatting vote dilution is necessary to achieve a government that is truly of, by, and for the people. HB 350 strengthens Maryland's democratic institutions, honors the legacy of the Voting Rights Act, and helps ensure that every eligible voter has an equal opportunity to participate in local democracy. For these reasons, I respectfully request a favorable report on HB 350.

Respectfully submitted,

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