

TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE GOVERNMENT, LABOR, ELECTIONS COMMITTEE

HB 350 Voting Rights Act of 2026 – Counties and Municipal Corporations

POSITION: Favorable

By: Linda Kohn, President

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The League of Women Voters was founded on the concept that voter participation is the essential element of a successful democracy. LWVMD has worked for over 100 years to ensure the right to vote for every citizen at all levels of government. HB 350 seeks to protect Marylanders from the devastating effects of the continuing gutting of the 1965 Voting Rights Act, as well as to address the damage caused by voter dilution.

HB 350 seeks to address critical issues that Maryland has been facing regarding racial vote dilution. This would allow communities that believe that they are being unfairly split at the local level to seek remedies and ultimately vote for a person who they believe represents them. For example, in Baltimore County, this was mainly seen in 2022 when, even though the ability was there, it took a lawsuit and public pressure for the county to recognize that it was purposefully diluting the voting power of the Black community by not drawing a map with two minority-majority districts. HB 350 would provide guidance not only on avoiding it but also on remedying it should it occur again, as the League suspects it will in other parts of Maryland.

This legislation would also give local governments the opportunity to reexamine their power structures to ensure that they are not outdated and accurately reflect the current or soon-to-be population of their districts. While this could mean ending structures like member-at-large districts, it would also usher in a new era where every vote is equal.

Furthermore, HB 350 would give litigators the guidance they need to sue if issues arise again regarding vote dilution. According to the attorneys who represented several Maryland organizations during the Baltimore County redistricting fight, although it was obvious that the maps still did not comply with the federal Voting Rights Act, there was no legal precedent to secure a remedy.¹ HB 350 would give guidance not only to those suing but also to the courts on how a violation must be rectified.

LWVMD urges a favorable report on HB 350 with the additional amendments.

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<https://marylandmatters.org/2022/03/10/in-baltimore-county-redistricting-case-plaintiffs-say-new-council-map-doesnt-comply-with-voting-rights-act/>