

February 11, 2026

Maryland House Government, Labor, and Elections Committee
142-145 Lowe House Office Building
6 Bladen St., Annapolis, Maryland 21401-1991

Statement of Support for S.B. 255 / H.B. 350 and H.B. 219, the Maryland Voting Rights Act

Dear Committee Members,

As a broad coalition of civil rights, community, faith, labor, and civic organizations, we urge you to prioritize and pass **S.B. 255 / H.B.350 and H.B. 219**, key pieces of the Maryland Voting Rights Act (MDVRA). In the last year, we have seen unprecedented and grave threats to voting rights and democracy nationally. In 2026 and beyond, the best way we can fight back against these attacks is to enact the MDVRA.

Recent polling shows that the MDVRA and each of its provisions are extremely popular among Maryland voters across race and party lines. Notably, 81% of Maryland voters [support an MDVRA](#), and 80% would like their state representative to prioritize its passage. This overwhelming support shows that creating a fair, inclusive democracy is a core Maryland value—and that the MDVRA is both good policy and the will of the people.

Across the country, we are witnessing an alarming rollback of core democratic protections. The federal Voting Rights Act of 1965 (VRA)—once the nation’s strongest safeguard against racial discrimination in voting—has been severely weakened by decades of damaging court decisions. The U.S. Supreme Court’s recent rulings in *Shelby County v. Holder* (2013) and *Brnovich v. Democratic National Committee* (2021) have stripped away essential federal oversight and made it extremely difficult for voters to challenge discriminatory practices. Moreover, the Supreme Court is now considering two major cases that could severely limit what’s left of the federal VRA. Together, these cases could strip away our last effective tools for fighting racial discrimination in voting.

Recent vote dilution challenges brought against Baltimore County and Federalsburg underscore persistent barriers to the ballot box, such as unfair districts or at-large systems that weaken Black voters’ electoral power. Although the challenges were successful in those cases, victories came only after costly, protracted legal battles that the MDVRA would help prevent. And if the Supreme Court sides with opponents of the federal VRA, such victories will be totally out of reach in Maryland without the MDVRA.

Immediate state legislative action is now essential. We cannot wait for Congress to restore what has been lost—it must act now to defend the freedom to vote for all Marylanders.

As currently proposed, the MDVRA makes Maryland's democracy more inclusive by:

- Enshrining robust protections against discriminatory vote dilution and voter suppression into state law;
- Creating strong protections against voter intimidation, deception, and obstruction; and
- Expanding language assistance in elections for voters with limited English proficiency.

Last session, the Language Access portion of the MDVRA was enacted. This session, we urge the Maryland legislature to pass the vote dilution, voter intimidation, and vote suppression provisions of the MDVRA.

S.B. 255 / H.B. 350 - Combating Racial Vote Dilution

We urge you to pass S.B. 255 / H.B. 350 to enact robust protections against discriminatory election systems that drown out the voices of color and deny them equal power to elect their preferred representatives, known as racial vote dilution. In building on Section 2 of the federal Voting Rights Act, this legislation benefits both voters and local governments in Maryland by providing an efficient framework to cost-effectively and holistically eliminate racial vote dilution.

Last session, these critical provisions gained considerable traction when they passed out of the Senate. This session, they must be prioritized and become state law to protect our democracy and voters of color in Maryland.

H.B. 219 - Combating Voter Intimidation and Suppression

We urge you to pass H.B. 219 to create a civil private right of action against voter intimidation to ensure that all Marylanders can participate in the political process free from harassment, intimidation, or threats of violence. Even though criminal prohibitions exist, civil protections are not currently available under Maryland law. By supplementing existing criminal prohibitions, H.B. 219 gives impacted voters the right to sue a person or group engaging in these acts. Protections like these are needed by Maryland voters who continue to face serious challenges, such as those at polling locations in [Montgomery County](#) in 2020 and [Frederick County](#) in 2024.

H.B. 219 would also protect against barriers that deny voting opportunities in a way that is efficient and cost-effective for both voters and local governments within the state. It builds upon the federal VRA by providing a clearer and more efficient framework for eliminating discriminatory barriers to the ballot, known as vote suppression. This provision will ensure that voters or the attorney general can hold jurisdictions accountable for maintaining

practices that suppress turnout in historically disenfranchised communities, such as inaccessible polling locations; inadequate voting hours; off-cycle election dates; wrongful voter purges; and staggered elections, among others.

If enacted, these two pieces of legislation would immediately position the Free State as a leader in protecting the right to vote and standing up to national threats against free and fair elections.

The MDVRA builds upon successful state VRAs that have already passed in Virginia, Connecticut, New York, Colorado, Minnesota, Washington, Oregon, and California. Similar bills are also actively under consideration in New Jersey and Delaware. As one of the nation's most diverse states, Maryland's democracy should reflect that in every aspect of the electoral process.

Now is Maryland's time to lead. We encourage you to prioritize, pass, and fully fund the MDVRA this legislative session, and we stand ready to work with you to secure this victory for all Maryland voters.

Sincerely,

Organizations

Based in Maryland

Advance Maryland
AFSCME Maryland Council 3
American Civil Liberties Union of Maryland
Baltimore Renters United
Baltimore-Washington Conference of The United Methodist Church
Black Girls Vote
CAIR Maryland
Common Cause Maryland
Community Action Network for Democracy, Liberties and Equality (CANDLE)
Gibson-Banks Center for Race and the Law,
University of Maryland Francis King Carey School of Law
Indivisible Bowie and Beyond (IBBMD)
Indivisible Calvert County
Indivisible Cambridge
Indivisible Catonsville

Maryland Voters

District 3

Tatiana Santos

District 5

Fay Dorsett
Mindy Meyer
Megan Grogard
Teresa Tidwell

District 7

Bonnie T.
Jane Beard
Jean Rasenberger

District 8

Carliss Maddox

District 10

Nehemiah Bester

District 14

Indivisible Central Maryland
Indivisible Eastern Shore
Indivisible Frederick MD
Indivisible Frederick Forward
Indivisible Howard County
Indivisible Maryland Coalition
Indivisible Montgomery County
Indivisible SMCMD
Jews United for Justice
League of Women Voters of Maryland
Maryland League of Conservation Voters
National Council of Jewish Women, Maryland
No Boundaries Coalition - 40th district, 21217
North Woodside Civil Resistance
Out for Justice
Progressive Maryland
Ranked Choice Voting Maryland
SEIU 1199
SEIU Local 500
St. Mary's County NAACP
The Talking Drum Incorporated
Third Act Maryland
UNITE HERE Local 7

National Partners

Asian American Legal Defense & Education Fund
Asian and Pacific Islander American Vote (APIAVote)
Black Voters Matter Fund
Campaign Legal Center
Declaration for American Democracy Coalition
Demos
Fair Elections Center
FairVote
Indivisible CT Shoreline
Institute for Responsive Government Action
LatinoJustice PRLDEF
Life After Release
Lugenia Burns Hope Center
NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF)
Power Coalition for Equity and Justice (PCEJ)
Public Citizen

Lindsay Mallick

District 15

Alexandra Estes
Ann Connor
Annie O'Connell DeMeo
Kim Westervelt
Taina Litwak

District 16

Julie A. Rosen, PhD
Meena Thermaratnam
Prabhat Garg
Shubhra Garg

District 17

Andrew Sutton
Carolyn Levine

District 18

Christine Stover
Kavita Sethi
Mary Sing

District 27

Ann Scharpf
Anne Meere Abner
Brigit Sharp
Frank McPhillips
Janet Ashby
Katharine Stewart
Kathryn R. Staford
Kristin Kerns-D'Amore
Maria Cosmas-Monnet
Maria Dorsett
Patricia Eleazar
Patricia M. Weaver
Peggy Murphy
Ruth Ticktin
Sandra Raviv
Sandra VanOosten
Susan Brayford
Susan Alexander
Trina Beal

District 28

Rebecca M. Turner

Public Justice Center, Inc.
Protect Democracy United
Secure Elections Network
The Center for Election Science

District 29

Audra Howard
Marcia Greenberg
Marcia Coe
Mary McDougal
Molly Shipley

District 30

Emily Manders
Jeannie Egan
Joan Slettvet
Joy R. Crosser
Louis de Merode
Merianne de Merode
Sharon Hensley

District 31

Michelle Koul

District 37

Jill Penaloza

District 40

Khalilah M. Harris

District 46

Julie Solomon