

HB0219 - FAV

February 11, 2026

Government, Labor, and Elections Committee

HB 219 – Maryland Voting Rights Act of 2026 (Voter Intimidation and Suppression)

Position: Favorable

I am writing on behalf of Dēmos to express our strong support for the Maryland Voting Rights Act (Voter Intimidation and Suppression - HB219), which is a Maryland-specific state voting rights act.

Dēmos is a non-profit public policy organization working to build a just, inclusive multiracial democracy and economy. We build power with and for Black and brown communities through our strategic partnerships with state-based and grassroots organizations, applying more than two decades of experience advancing policy solutions, research, legal advocacy, and narrative strategies. Since our founding in 2000, we have collaborated with our partners to put pro-democracy and economic justice narratives at the center of the national conversation and shift law and policy closer toward a just, multiracial democracy.

Dēmos strongly urges the Committee to pass HB 219 to enact protections against voter intimidation, deception and obstruction, and voter suppression in Maryland. The protections contained in HB 219 are essential to ensure that all Marylanders have the equal opportunity to freely elect the representatives of their choice.

For over sixty years, the federal Voting Rights Act (VRA) of 1965 has served as the nation’s most effective tool for addressing discriminatory voting practices. Section 2 of the federal VRA has addressed the long history of discrimination in voting by prohibiting racial vote dilution and voter suppression, and section 5 of the federal VRA has prevented discriminatory practices through preclearance. In addition, section 11(b) of the VRA can combat voter intimidation, but it does not clearly extend to voter deception. The U.S. Supreme Court has severely limited the federal VRA’s protections through cases such *Shelby County v. Holder* (2013), which gutted the coverage formula in the preclearance program, and *Brnovich v. DNC* (2021), which made it near-impossible to challenge discriminatory voter suppression.

While the federal VRA can prevent voting laws that harm Black and brown voters in unique ways, the *Brnovich* legal test leaves voters of color without a meaningful federal protection against voter suppression. Additionally, the federal government has been failing to protect against intimidation and suppression in our voting processes while actively advancing anti-voter policies. At a time when federal protections have weakened and voting rights enforcement has become increasingly uncertain, Maryland legislators have both the authority and the

responsibility to safeguard fair and equal access to the ballot by passing HB 219's prohibitions against intimidation and suppression.

Unfortunately, rights abuses and discriminatory election methods persist in many of Maryland's local government entities. At present, there is no prohibition against suppressive election policies and practices under Maryland law. HB 219 would remedy this by codifying a clear prohibition against voter suppression, which includes policies and practices that burden access to voting such as voter roll purges that disproportionately target voters of color or allowing disproportionately long lines in communities of color. These outdated policies can restrict voting in ways that disproportionately reduce political influence and participation in elections among Black and brown communities. HB 219 further establishes prohibitions against conduct that interferes with the right to vote through intimidation, fraud, or obstruction, thus protecting voters at every stage of the electoral process.

At present, Maryland does have a criminal prohibition against voter intimidation; however, enforcement of this law depends on the resources of the state Attorney General. Instances of intimidation have increased since 2020, but the legal tools and resources needed to investigate these incidents remain costly and out of reach for victims. HB 219 would help solve this problem by creating a new streamlined process by allowing victims to bring their own cases and to seek practical relief – all while saving valuable resources and funds.

HB 219 also creates expansive civil protections against voter intimidation that can address deception and obstruction. Voter intimidation refers to conduct aimed at interfering, preventing, or influencing an individual's ability to engage with our elections; voter deception refers to the use of false or misleading messages or schemes that interfere with voting; and voter obstruction refers to blocking, delaying, or interfering with voters' access to polling places, ballot drop boxes, or the voting process itself. It is critically important that Maryland voters have protections against all three. When voters face misinformation, intimidation, or unequal access to the ballot box, public confidence in our democratic systems erodes. Enacting strong prohibitions against voter intimidation and suppression at the state level is a step towards regaining that trust.

HB 219 strengthens Maryland's democratic institutions, maintains the legacy of the federal Voting Rights Act, and ensures that voters possess robust tools to fight voter intimidation and suppressive election practices. For these reasons, Dēmos requests a favorable report on HB 219.

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