

HB0350 - FAV

February 11, 2026

Government, Labor, and Elections Committee

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

Position: Favorable

I am writing on behalf of Dēmos to express our strong support for the Maryland Voting Rights Act (Counties and Municipal Corporations – HB350), 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 350 to enact protections against racial vote dilution in Maryland. Racial vote dilution occurs when electoral practices, such as at-large elections or unfair district maps, weaken the voting strength of voters of color, effectively denying those voters and their communities meaningful political participation. The protections outlined in HB 350 are essential to ensuring that all Marylanders, particularly those from historically disenfranchised communities, have an equal opportunity to elect 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. 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. Section 2’s applicability to the redistricting process and meaningful representation for communities of color is now under threat in *Louisiana v. Callais*, which is currently pending in the U.S. Supreme Court.

At a time when federal voting rights protections have been weakened and enforcement has become increasingly uncertain, Maryland legislators have both the authority and the responsibility to safeguard fair and equal access to the ballot.

HB 350 would address these challenges by building on the protections provided in the federal VRA through more appropriate standards and more streamlined procedures, which are designed both to protect the right to vote and to make litigation less resource-intensive and less costly. Maryland law currently contains no protections against racial vote dilution, and recent challenges to racially dilutive voting systems in Federalsburg and Baltimore County make clear that there is a critical need for these kinds of protections.

When voters of color are systematically prevented from electing the candidates of their choice, entire communities are left without a voice in decisions that directly impact their lives. Prohibiting racial vote dilution is thus essential to promote a more inclusive and accountable democracy.

HB 350 would strengthen Maryland's democratic institutions, honor the legacy of the federal Voting Rights Act, and help ensure that every eligible voter has an equal opportunity to participate in choosing who represents them. For these reasons, Dēmos respectfully requests a favorable report on HB 350.

Angelo Ancheta
Senior Research & Policy Counsel, Dēmos
E-Mail: aancheta@demos.org
Address: 368 9th Avenue, 6th Fl., New York, NY 10001