



**TESTIMONY TO THE SENATE EDUCATION, HEALTH, AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

**SB413 Voting Rights Act of 2022 – Counties and Municipalities**

**POSITION: Favorable**

**BY: Nancy Soreng, President**

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The League of Women Voters of Maryland is a nonpartisan organization that has worked for over a century to empower voters by increasing citizen's understanding of public policy issues and advocating for transparency and best practices. We support SB413 based on our positions that it is important for election systems to produce representation that reflects community sentiment AND we support redistricting processes and enforceable standards that promote fair and effective representation at all levels of government.

Existing Maryland law does not include sufficient safeguards for protected classes in the local redistricting process. This means that minority neighborhoods that are disadvantaged in the redistricting process have no recourse but to sue under the Voting Rights Act (VRA). This puts the cost of justice on the very communities that can least afford it. Predictably, we are aware of only two instances where this happened:

1. In 1985, violation of the VRA in Dorchester County was alleged in federal court and as a result Dorchester County reached a settlement and changed their election methods.
2. In 2021, civil rights groups including the League of Women Voters of Baltimore County challenged local redistricting in federal court, bearing the expense of defending minorities against attempts to dilute their voting rights.

Maryland, as a majority-minority state, needs to codify electoral rights for protected classes, rather than relying on federal laws. If SB413 were law, then the Attorney General could investigate and enforce it, rather than the state relying on non-partisan entities to protect minorities. LWVMD, representing over 1,500 concerned citizens throughout Maryland, urges a favorable report on SB413 Voting Rights Act of 2022 – Counties and Municipalities.