

EDUCATION, HEALTH, AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS**February 22, 2022****SB 413 – Voting Rights Act of 2022 – Counties and Municipalities****Position: SUPPORT**

Disability Rights Maryland (DRM – formerly Maryland Disability Law Center) is the Protection & Advocacy agency in Maryland, mandated to advance the civil rights of people with disabilities. DRM works to increase opportunities for Marylanders with disabilities to be part of their communities through equal and clear access to the ballot by advocating for eliminating and reducing barriers to voting for people with disabilities.

DRM supports SB 413 which will prohibit methods of diluting a protected class' ability to elect a governing body of a county and municipal, which essentially violates their voting rights. Spurred by the Baltimore County's redistricting map that only has one Black majority district, we support the protections afforded in SB 413 to preserve the desires of Black voters in Baltimore County to elect officials that they believe will serve in the best interests. Historically, Black voters constantly receive and navigate methods that attempt to stifle their electoral voice since all Black people were afforded the right to vote through the 15th and 19th amendments. Baltimore County's redistricting map only reinforces the unfair and immoral power dynamics that contribute to systemic racism by diluting the voices of Black voters to elect officials that represent them and violates the Voting Rights Act.

Black people represent 30% of Baltimore County's population, however the current redistricting map only allocates one Black majority district out of the total seven that makes up Baltimore County. The current redistricting map approved by the Baltimore County Council contributes to racial gerrymandering and violates the Voting Rights Act which federally protects counties and municipalities from diluting the electoral power of historically disenfranchised voters. Disability Rights Maryland is particularly concerned because of the implications on Black voters with disabilities in Baltimore County. Currently, Black people with disabilities make up 10.5% of the population in Baltimore County according to the 2019 American Community Survey¹. Black people with disabilities face a unique lived experience due to their race and disability. Race and disability identities will interact and produce a different lived experience than just one identity can experience.

In addition to the historical barriers to voting Black people are still facing, such as the racial gerrymandering occurring in Baltimore County, Black voters with disabilities also face barriers to the polls due to their disability such as inaccessible polling locations and undertrained election judges that can create a negative voting experience. The Baltimore County Council's redistricting map adds an additional barrier that continues to attempt to stifle the voice of Black voters with disabilities by diluting the power of their electoral voice to elect candidates that

¹ <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?g=0500000US24005&tid=ACST1Y2019.S1810>



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represent their best interests and upholds an unfair power imbalance that contributes to the racial inequalities persistent across all sectors of our society. HB 413 is a necessary measure that will ensure the protections of the Voting Rights Act is realized for historically disenfranchised voters, particularly Black voters with disabilities in Baltimore County.

For these reasons DRM urges a **favorable** report on **SB 413**.

Please do not hesitate to contact me at samuelaa@disabilityrightsmd.org or by phone at 443-356-6304.