



**Testimony for the House Ways and Means Committee
February 7, 2013**

HB 220 – Voter’s Rights Protection Act

SUPPORT

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HB 220, Voter’s Rights Protection Act, provides for timely access to the circuit court during an election for allegations of violations of Maryland’s law governing campaign materials. By so doing, the bill addresses a problem the ACLU of Maryland has documented in prior Maryland elections. The ACLU of Maryland supports the bill and urges a favorable report.

The bill states that when there are reasonable grounds to believe that an organization or entity has engaged in or is about to engage in a practice prohibited by §16-101 or §16-201 of the Election Law Article, the Attorney General may institute an action for injunctive relief in the circuit court. These provisions of the Election Law Article relate to voter fraud and intimidation. Under the bill, the circuit court shall immediately hear and determine the matter without requiring the exhaustion of administrative or other remedies.

The ACLU of Maryland operates an election protection program during every statewide election. During the 2006 elections, the ACLU of Maryland, as did other entities, learned about fraudulent campaign material distributed in the days and hours before the election. These materials misrepresented endorsements of candidates, contained false information about the day of the election and voter eligibility and erroneous sample ballots with the party affiliation of selected candidates. Because these materials were distributed so close in time to the election itself, it was difficult to rebut false claims, meaningfully enforce the election law, or provide voters with accurate information before polls opened and closed.

In addition, in the 2010 elections we were contacted about misleading calls. Immediate access to the circuit court would provide an avenue for swift redress that is so important in ensuring the integrity of our elections.

The ACLU of Maryland urges a favorable report on HB 220.