

The Maryland Voting Rights Act (MDVRA)

HOW THE MDVRA FIGHTS VOTE DILUTION

The MDVRA protects your rights as a Maryland voter

The Maryland Voting Rights Act sets a new standard for protecting voters of color at the state level. To learn about all its key provisions, visit www.mdvra.org.

What is vote dilution?

Vote dilution happens when an election system or other policies deny voters of color an equal opportunity to elect candidates they support. This means voters of color can cast ballots, but their votes don't have equal power to elect candidates the community supports. The MDVRA provides communities an efficient way to challenge this when it happens in local counties, towns, and cities.

Is this the same as voter suppression?

While it is also covered by the MDVRA, voter suppression is different — that's when an eligible voter is prevented from voting altogether, or can only vote after overcoming unfair barriers (like having to pay a poll tax, or complying with strict voter ID laws).

How do you spot vote dilution?

- If a town or school district is racially diverse, but its elected officials aren't — or if candidates supported by voters of color usually lose to candidates supported by white voters — there may be unlawful vote dilution.
- Vote dilution can happen even if a town or county does not intend to discriminate.

How does vote dilution happen?

Vote dilution is mainly seen with “at-large” election systems or unfair district maps that deny people of color a fair vote.

- In an at-large system, all voters in a county, town, or city are represented by the same official(s), rather than having different officials represent smaller sections of the population (called “districts” or “wards”). At-large systems can lead to vote dilution because only a slim majority of the entire population is needed to win — even if voters of color make up a significant part a community, this system can shut down their power to choose their representatives.
- District maps that are drawn unfairly also dilute the power of voters of color, like when maps “pack” and “crack” communities of color by concentrating them into a small minority of districts that does not match their share of the overall population, and splitting up the rest among the other majority of districts so that their size is never enough to elect the candidates they prefer for those seats. As a result, the community’s preferred representative, which they can generally only elect in the “packed” district, can be consistently out-ranked by those who may not represent the community’s interests.

The MDVRA will protect your rights as a Maryland voter

How does the MDVRA fix vote dilution?

Once a jurisdiction is notified that its election method is dilutive, the MDVRA requires the jurisdiction to remedy the violation promptly and fully, with public input and participation.

Counties can also order jurisdictions to change their election systems or district maps or make other structural changes to ensure that everyone has an equal voice in local democracy.

With the MDVRA, there are opportunities for diverse communities to work together to propose creative remedies, which the court must consider rather than maintaining the status quo by only accepting the government's proposal.

MDVRA EXPLAINED.

Maryland: Fight back against voter intimidation.

Pass SB 255/HB 350 Now.

Examples of Impact

Marylanders have successfully challenged vote dilution under the federal Voting Rights Act, including in Wicomico and Federalsburg.

- **Wicomico:** Despite Wicomico County being over 40 percent BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color), only one Black person has ever been elected to the Wicomico County Council or Board of Education under a partial at-large election system, despite decades of advocacy and struggle by local Black residents to change the system. In 2025, a federal judge finally dismantled Wicomico's partial at-large election system, replacing it with seven equitable single-member districts.
- **Federalsburg:** After 200 years of discrimination against Black voters in the Town of Federalsburg, Black voters were finally able to elect representation to the town council in September 2024 under a new court ordered, fair map.

With the MDVRA, more communities will have access to these needed protections.



LEARN ABOUT THE KEY PROVISIONS OF THE MDVRA:

www.mdvra.org