

FREE STATE LIBERTIES

ACLU
Maryland

SUMMER 2026

One Step Forward:

Why the Fight for Maryland
Voting Rights Isn't Over

By Nehemiah Bester

Following years of relentless advocacy, Maryland passed the Maryland Voting Rights Act (MDVRA) on April 28, 2026. This law bans racially discriminatory local voting systems and allows the state to address systems that weaken the voting power of marginalized communities. The MDVRA also addresses deeply ingrained barriers to free and fair elections in Maryland, unfair districts, and at-large election systems that reduce the power of Black voters and voters of color.

Dara Johnson, Associate Staff Attorney for the ACLU of Maryland, emphasized the significance of this achievement. **“This is a pivotal moment for voting rights in Maryland,” Johnson said.** “This victory represents what Black voters and other voters of color have been saying for years — that Maryland’s diverse communities deserve a better way to safeguard their votes in local elections.”

Despite this achievement, the very next day brought a setback at the national level. **On April 29, 2026, the Supreme Court effectively weakened the federal Voting Rights Act (VRA)** in the *Louisiana v. Callais* decision. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 was enacted to correct the constant state-sponsored voter discrimination that disenfranchised millions of eligible Black voters throughout the era of Jim Crow.

The decision explicitly strips away power from Section 2 of the VRA, making it harder to challenge discriminatory voting maps and further dilutes the voting access and power of Black voters and other communities of color.

ACLU of Maryland Executive Director, **Dana Vickers Shelley**, had this to say about the decision: “By weakening the Voting Rights Act, the Supreme Court has turned its back on decades of progress and left millions of Black voters more vulnerable to discrimination. We will always fight for fair representation for all Marylanders. **Our democracy demands nothing less.**”

While the attack on Section 2 of the federal VRA is damaging, the passage of the MDVRA maintains the right to challenge vote dilution in Maryland. As voting rights across the country are threatened, **our state still needs to pass legislation that establishes protections against voter suppression and intimidation.**

The MDVRA becoming law was not possible without the countless coalition and community partners who got it across the finish line. Because of this work, Maryland is a better place for free and fair elections for Black voters and communities of color. However, **we’ll continue showing up in court and in the legislature until Maryland is free from all forms of voter discrimination.**

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The newsletter of the American Civil Liberties Union of Maryland and the American Civil Liberties Union Foundation of Maryland.

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Dana Vickers Shelley

Read about our Board of Directors and Staff on our website: aclu-md.org/staff

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Documents and information filed under the Maryland Solicitations Act may be obtained from the Maryland Secretary of State, State House, Annapolis, MD 21401.

2026 Legislative Report

The ACLU of Maryland Report for the 2026 Legislative Session is now available to view and download on our website: aclu-md.org. The report includes analysis and information on the legislation we supported during the 90-day Maryland Legislative Session, including our primary and secondary priorities. As mentioned in this Summer Newsletter, some of **our big wins this year include ending 287(g) agreements in Maryland, setting limits on informal collaborations with ICE, and passing Maryland's first Voting Rights Act (MDVRA)**. We plan to build on these wins for the 2027 Legislative Session. For more information and to read the report in full, visit our website, where we also include our slide deck presentation from our post-session town hall.

Legislative Updates

Emergency Legislation Banning Formal 287(g) Agreements

After years of dedicated advocacy in the face of rising intimidation and a national agenda rooted in fear and cruelty, **formal 287(g) agreements (SB 245/HB 444) are now banned in the state of Maryland**. Under the Trump Administration's second term, 287(g) agreements tripled statewide, leading to thousands of deportations and targeting of people without criminal convictions. Maryland does not have a legal obligation to assist in federal immigration enforcement and continued collaboration only further diverted taxpayer dollars. **287(g) was never about public safety; it was about public authoritarianism**. Signed as emergency legislation, ending this harmful program in Maryland means that local law enforcement can no longer be deputized as ICE agents.



"Our democracy demands nothing less."



Maryland General Assembly Passes the Community Trust Act

While the end of 287(g) programs in Maryland officially banned all formal collaborations with ICE, it did not stop informal collaborations. **The Community Trust Act (SB 791) was the next necessary step to safeguard public safety**. Most of Maryland's collaboration with ICE has been informal and dangerous to immigrant communities. In 2025, nearly 5,000 Marylanders were arrested by ICE, with 1 in 3 arrests stemming from voluntary local collaboration. **The Community Trust Act limits how law enforcement can informally collude with ICE**, protects people who are innocent or have yet to be convicted of a crime from notification and transfer to ICE without a court order or a judicial warrant, and bans the unconstitutional practice of holding people who are released from local correctional facilities past their release date for the purposes of immigration enforcement without a judicial warrant. The bill went into law without the Governor's signature.



Go to our website to view the **2026 Legislative Report:**

aclu-md.org/publications/2026-general-assembly-report/

Legal Briefs

Challenging Deadly Conditions at Harford County Jail

Many people held at the Harford County Detention Center **haven't been convicted of any crime, but for years, they've been dying in detention.** To address this crisis, we joined the NAACP, Washington Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs, and Mayer Brown LLP in filing a federal civil rights lawsuit. **The lawsuit exposes a lethal pattern of deliberate indifference at the jail, where the suicide rate is five times the national average.** It documents at least 20 recent incidents of suicide and self-harm driven by dangerous conditions, including deficient mental health screenings, excessive isolation, and bunk beds officials knew were being used for hangings. The complaint includes the account of plaintiff Charles Morris, who spent a week hospitalized in a coma while jail officials directed hospital staff to keep his family in the dark unless he became brain dead. The case seeks systemic reform and accountability from Sheriff Jeffrey Gahler, Warden Daniel J. Galbraith, Harford County, and the State of Maryland.

Protecting the Private Data of Maryland Voters

When the Department of Justice **demand**ed that Maryland hand over voters' most sensitive personal information, including names, addresses, dates of birth, driver's license numbers, and partial Social Security numbers, we moved quickly, joining Common Cause, Out for Justice, and three Maryland voters in filing a motion to intervene and block the request. We argued that the DOJ's sweeping demand threatened voter privacy, could fuel mass voter challenges and purges, and was part of a broader effort to build an unauthorized national voter database. **In June 2026, a federal court rejected the demand outright — the ninth time courts have blocked the agency's nationwide campaign to obtain states' voter registration data.**

Blocking a Mass Internment Facility in Hagerstown

The federal government quietly purchased an 825,000-square-foot warehouse near Hagerstown and moved to convert it into a mass internment facility to be used as a human warehouse. We joined our partners in filing an amicus brief in *State of Maryland v. Mullin*, successfully urging the court to stop the plan to detain up to 1,500 people daily in a facility designed for goods, not people. Prioritizing speed and secrecy over safety has already led to disease outbreaks and 46 deaths in ICE custody since January 2025. **People should not be treated like cargo, and we are committed to challenging this system.**

Demanding Transparency from Somerset County Schools

Across Maryland, school boards have secretly banned books and altered curricula. In Somerset County, **officials have radically altered book banning procedures to seize control from educators,** rejected recommended curricula without explanation, and concealed how much taxpayer money is being spent on discrimination and censorship. **We sued the Somerset County Board of Education under the Maryland Public Information Act** after the Board repeatedly refused to release public records about its book removal policies, the dismissal of its Black superintendent, and taxpayer-funded legal expenses. The Board has taken control of book selection from librarians, changed legal counsel without open bidding, and excluded parents and the superintendent from meetings. **Families deserve transparent decisions about their children's schools, and we are committed to ending both the secrecy and the censorship.**

Cover Image: Photo by Zemarr Brandao

Page 2: Photos by Mary Ella Jourdak & ACLU Maryland Policy Team

Page 3: Photo by Christian Oven



☑ BOARD MEMBER NOMINATIONS

Below is the **Ballot of Nominees** for the ACLU of Maryland Board of Directors. These nominees were considered by the ACLU Nominating Committee, were provisionally approved by the Board, and are submitted now to ACLU members for a vote. **After voting "yes" or "no," please clip the ballot and send it in the enclosed envelope (preferred), or mail it to the ACLU of Maryland, 3600 Clipper Mill Road, Suite 200, Baltimore, MD 21211. Votes must be postmarked by July 31, 2026.**



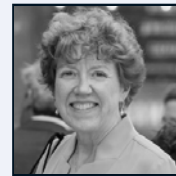
AMANDA SCOTT DAIGLE
Montgomery County

YES NO



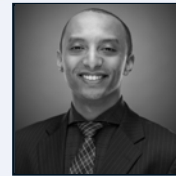
JORDY DIAZ
Montgomery County

YES NO



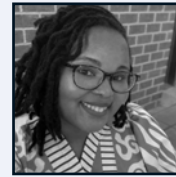
LYNNE DURBIN
Baltimore County

YES NO



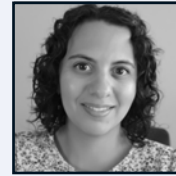
HIRUY HADGU
Howard County

YES NO



IESHAAH MURPHY
Baltimore City

YES NO



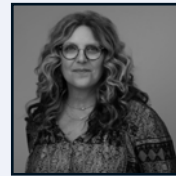
TATIANA SANTOS
Frederick County

YES NO



VALERIE TWANMOH
Baltimore County

YES NO



WENDY WOLFF
Baltimore County

YES NO

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