



UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND

COLLEGE OF BEHAVIORAL AND SOCIAL SCIENCE
DEPARTMENT OF GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS

SB647: Election Law - Institutions of Higher Education - Voter Registration and Voting by Students (Student Voter Empowerment Act of 2020)
Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee
February 20th, 2020
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My name is Michael Hanmer. I am a professor of Government and Politics at the University of Maryland, College Park. My research and teaching interests focus on political participation and public opinion, with an emphasis on how citizens respond to electoral reforms, and mobilization efforts. Several of my projects have focused specifically on understanding college student voter registration and turnout.

I have had the pleasure of working with students on my campus and participating in various workshops with students from across the University of Maryland System. I have been incredibly impressed with their ideas, motivation, and dedication to civic engagement.

College students are at a key moment in their development as citizens. It is a meaningful step for state government to recognize students' interests and encourage their participation. The benefits to the individual students will be clear in both the short term and long term. My research, and that of others, shows that students are highly motivated to participate and are responsive to efforts to engage them. I have seen this in action. For example, the TerpsVote coalition, a group of students, staff, and faculty at the University of Maryland, College Park, worked with the Registrar to ensure a voter registration link was placed prominently on the Registrar's website. TerpsVote also created a clear action plan, and implemented it with great success, helping maintain a high level of voter registration and dramatically increasing voter turnout in 2018. But there is much more room for improvement overall, and in particular among students who major in STEM fields, where registration and turnout rates tend to be much lower than average.

Beyond the benefits of participation to the individual students, I expect to see a broader set of benefits. I believe this will come from helping colleges and universities fulfill their missions to provide a comprehensive education and create new knowledge through research. Based on my experience working with students I believe this bill can be used to help spur innovation in courses, including new experiential learning opportunities. It will also help generate new research opportunities for undergraduate students, graduate students, and faculty. Moreover, I expect that when students recognize the support the state and their campuses have provided to enrich their experience that their sense of connection will also be strengthened.

I encourage you to give the bill a favorable report.