

February 20, 2020

Testimony on SB 647
Election Law - Institutions of Higher Education - Voter Registration and Voting by Students (Student Voter Empowerment Act of 2020)
Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

Position: Favorable

Common Cause Maryland supports SB 647 which would require college campuses with populations over 4500 to have a polling place on their campus during elections. It also requires the State Board of Elections to maintain a page on its website that includes clear information about voter registration and voting by students enrolled in institutions of higher education. Additionally, college campuses would have a student voting coordinator develop and implement a plan to increase student voter registration.

Institution of higher education throughout the state should be doing all that they can to encourage voter participation on their campus communities. HB 245 provides them with straightforward opportunities to do so. Something as simple as establishing polling locations on local campuses can improve the voter turnout amongst students and staff. Universities are already centers of diversity and learning so they are in a good position to educate students about how to become more politically involved.

For many students going to college is their first time stepping out into the real world and gaining independence. Some are far from home and loved ones, but are still trying to build a life where they can be an educated citizen with a stable future. Politics may seem intimidating to some students. With this new policy, students will approach this fundamental part of democracy feeling encouraged not discouraged.

We have an opportunity to ensure that young voter turnout continues to rise and this can be done by putting pressure on our government and educational institutions to see the value in educating students and their community about our democracy. These institutions teach our society's future engineers, scientists, medical professionals and artists and are fully capable of teaching those same students about the rights and political power they have as a citizen.

We urge a favorable report.