



HOUSE WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE
House Bill 156
Student and Military Voter Empowerment Act
January 26, 2021
Information

Chair Kaiser, Vice Chair Washington and committee members, thank you for the opportunity to share our thoughts on House Bill 156. The bill establishes various requirements relating to voter registration and voting by students at institutions of higher education. The University System of Maryland (USM) has a long track record supporting civic engagement including voter registration efforts. The last year has presented unforeseen challenges, but more Americans voted in the 2020 election — two-thirds of the voting eligible population — than in any other in 120 years.

The USM Board of Regents hosted a System-wide Civic Education/Civic Engagement (CECE) workshop in 2019 to bring campus teams together to report on the campus-level progress on the three committees that came out of the Regents’ Workgroup on Civic Education and Civic Engagement in 2018. Those committees reviewed specifically the area of student voting. As described below in the USM voter study summary report, student voter registration and turnout are best measured over a longer period. Campus staff is concerned also that counting “clicks” and “screenshots” over a preceding calendar year may be a burden that yields no new understanding about student voting.

In addition to the highlights above, the National Study of Learning Voting and Engagement (NSLVE) presented the most recent [summary report](#) on voter registration and voting statistics for the USM. For example, many institutions named Carnegie Community Engagement Classification (“Carnegie Classification”) as a long-term goal. The application window opens every five years and Towson University has earned the Community Engagement Classification. The University of Maryland, Baltimore County and Salisbury University applied for and attained the classification for the 2020 cycle. The next window opens in 2025.

In order to increase student voting, institutions discussed several possible strategies, such as (1) using the university as a polling place, (2) early voting, (3) holding an Election Day festival, and (4) seeking Student Government Association support for student voting. The 2019 NSLVE Report confirmed a strong student voter registration and voting turnout across USM, an increase in the 2018 elections of almost 24% over the voting rate in 2014. However, absent some amendment, House Bill 156 may overlook tried and true techniques for current voter mobilization activities in Maryland’s public universities.

All USM residential campuses maintain and promote a voter information and registration web page with election-related deadlines and links to all states’ voter registration and absentee ballot information.

A few pre-pandemic examples include:

- Led by the Student Government Association and Center for Democracy and Civic Life, UMBC departments and student organizations collaborate on programs that promote voter engagement and civil dialogue. UMBC provides students free shuttle transportation to several counties' early voting centers and free Election Day transportation to the polling station that serves UMBC's residential communities.
- Bowie State University hosts a Voter Information Table: Our History, Our Vote Matters 2020 – Students can stop by and receive information at the "Our History, Our Vote Matters 2020" awareness table highlighting the 150th Anniversary of the 15th Amendment, 100th Anniversary of the 19th Amendment, 55th Anniversary of the and 2020 election dates.
- Beginning this spring, the Salisbury University (SU) Institute for Public Affairs and Civic Engagement (PACE) will launch their 'SUVotes2020' campaign for the upcoming primary and general elections. Leveraging their social media platforms (@PACE Salisbury) to engage students, they plan to push out weekly updates including voter information and student testimonials. SU also plans to inform students through our 'Fun Fact Friday' of many of the different voter dates outlined in the Maryland State Board of Election's '2020 Presidential Election Calendar'. In addition to social media, PACE will continue utilizing their campus-wide email privileges to convey important dates such as deadlines to register, polling information, and voter lookup.

Thank you for allowing the USM to share our thoughts regarding House Bill 156.