



Ways and Means Committee

Letter of Information

Submitted by
Bernie Sadusky, Executive Director
January 27, 2021

Bill: HB 156- Student and Military Voter Empowerment Act

The Maryland Association of Community Colleges is grateful to the sponsor that this legislation recognized our concerns expressed in testimony submitted last year on HB 245. As a result, HB 156 changes the provision that provides students with an excused absence from classes to vote to a “two hour” excused absence to vote. MACC supports continuing efforts to facilitate our students' ability to vote, but our priority continues to be the upholding of academic standards to ensure that our institutions meet national and state accreditation requirements. We ask that that the sponsor eliminate the section of HB 156 that provides students with a two-hour excused absence from class.

HB 156 requires our institutions to implement a student voting plan that incorporates a policy which would allow students to be excused from class to vote. Many of our students, particularly in allied health programs, are required to participate in a minimum number of instructional minutes in clinical rotations with local employers. Missing critical class time impacts the learning environment, and in the case of clinical rotations, may be contrary to employer policies.

Unlike our four-year partners where most students live on campus, community college students often travel significant distances from their homes to attend classes and their polling locations are far from campus. Excusing a student from class to vote will result in some students missing several required classes as they travel to and from distant polling places.

Given the accessibility of early voting, absentee voting and mail-in ballots in Maryland it makes sense to direct students toward these alternatives instead of negatively impacting their classroom participation. HB 156 presently requires a student voting plan which includes plans for dissemination of information about the process and deadlines for requesting and returning a ballot by mail, as well as the locations and dates for early voting. These efforts will give students every opportunity to vote without missing critical class or required clinical participation. We request that HB 156 be amended as follows:

AMENDMENT 1

On page 8, beginning with line 19 (V) delete the words

(V) A POLICY ALLOWING A STUDENT TO BE EXCUSED FROM CLASS OR ABSENT FROM A JOB WITH THE INSTITUTION FOR A PERIOD NOT TO EXCEED 2 HOURS FOR THE PURPOSE OF VOTING ON ELECTION DAY, IF THE STUDENT DOES NOT HAVE 2 HOURS OF CONTINUOUS TIME OUT OF CLASS OR OFF FROM A JOB WITH THE INSTITUTION DURING THE TIME THE POLLS ARE OPEN ON ELECTION DAY;

Community colleges are known as democracy's colleges for our uniquely American commitment to provide universal access to postsecondary education. As part of our mission, we prepare students for economic prosperity and to become active participants in their communities. Voter registration and participation by our students is important and will be strengthened by the requirements of HB 156.

The Maryland Association of Community Colleges and the Maryland Chief Student Affairs Officers recommend passage of this bill with the proposed amendment, and we thank you for your consideration.