

January 26, 2021

Testimony on HB 156

Election Law - Institutions of Higher Education - Voter Registration and Voting by Students (Student & Military Voter Empowerment Act of 2021)
Ways and Means

Position: Favorable

On behalf of the Young Democrats of Maryland Caucus of Color, we would like to thank Delegate Luedtke for introducing this bill. We would also like to extend our sincere appreciation to the Ways and Means Committee for allowing us to explain how this bill will benefit young people of color in the state of Maryland. The Young Democrats Caucus of Color serves to promote the involvement of young people of color in the political process. We understand the benefit that a commitment to diversity and youth plays in our democracy. With this in mind, we fully support HB 156. This bill would require certain institutions to aid in the betterment of voter education and registration for students. The State Board of Elections would be required to maintain a page on its website that includes certain information about and links regarding 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.

One of the main purposes of higher institutions is to educate. Upon graduation from an institution of higher education, students are expected to be properly educated on certain duties that they may decide to participate. Contrary to this, many students remain unaware of certain aspects of the voting process and in turn graduate without ever learning such knowledge. With this in mind, institutions of higher education throughout the state should be doing all that they can to encourage voter participation on their campus communities. HB 156 provides them with straightforward opportunities to do so.

For many students going to college is their first time stepping out into the real world and gaining independence. This is especially so for first generation folks and students of color who are among the most likely to be the first in their families to attend an institution of higher education. 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. They may not be aware of what a polling location is or even how to cast a vote. This is especially true for many immigrant students who make up a large portion of college campuses. The predicament of decipher archaic language located on voting sites serves as a deterrent to voter participation. This bill will promote the need for collaboration between elected officials, activist organizations and college campuses. This collaboration will ensure that students from Historically Black Colleges and Universities and other institutions will be properly Informed and educated on all aspects of the voting process.

We have the opportunity today to make a change for young people in Maryland. Our actions will ensure that that students today and, in the future, will never be confused about voting. Voter participation will increase when we make it our mission to educate the youth. College campuses open each day to educate our students on complex laws, mathematical equations and complex theories, it should not be a hassle then to educate students on our democracy and the most sacred aspect of it: voting.

We urge a favorable report.