



Maryland Senate
Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
February 21, 2024
Submitted February 20, 2024

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of SB 515, regarding voter preregistration. Fair Elections Center is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to removing barriers to registration and voting through advocacy and impact litigation. The Center's Campus Vote Project educates and engages young voters on voting rights issues, working to institutionalize civic engagement and voting at university and college campuses, including in Maryland.

Preregistration permits otherwise-eligible citizens who are not yet of voting age to complete a voter registration application and automatically be added to the state's voter rolls when they turn eighteen. Such laws have been shown in other states to improve registration rates and to increase the likelihood that these young citizens will vote upon reaching voting age.¹ These laws prepare our young people for a future with fewer barriers to vote, expand opportunities for teens to organize in their communities, and assist students in developing early voting habits that will last a lifetime.

Reaching More Young People and Simplifying Administrative Processes: Maryland has been a leader in encouraging the participation of young voters. SB 515 would reduce the age at which an individual may preregister to vote, from sixteen years to fifteen years and nine months. This small change would align preregistration efforts with the age at which an individual can earn a learner's permit, simplifying administrative practices and reaching more young people. By closing this gap, Maryland can ensure that there are no missed opportunities for engaging with the young people who interact with the Maryland MVA: young people applying for their learner's permit will also be able to simultaneously preregister to vote.

Adjusting the preregistration age will also facilitate expanded voter registration efforts in high schools, allowing high school registration efforts to deepen their potential reach.

¹ Michael McDonald & Matthew Thornburg, Registering the Youth Through Voter Preregistration, 13 N.Y.U.J. LEGIS. & PUB. POL'Y 551 (2010), available at <http://www.nyujlpp.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Michael-P.-McDonald-Matthew-Thornburg-Registering-the-Youth-Through-Voter-Preregistration.pdf>.

Improving Pre-registrant Communications: Fair Elections Center and its Campus Vote Project urge the Senate to incorporate into SB 515 the improved notice procedures that are included in HB 436. The notice procedures in HB 436 would require that the voter notification card sent to preregistered voters under the age of eighteen clearly explain when that individual will become eligible to vote. Further encouraging participation, preregistered voters would receive an additional communication from the county election office when they become eligible to vote in the next scheduled primary election. This notification would contain information on the methods of voting and the locations of early voting centers and polling places, bridging the information gap that is a barrier for many new voters. These additional communications from county elections offices would minimize confusion and ensure young voters stay in the loop, and we urge the Senate to adopt them.

SB 515 would improve election administration and confirm for young Marylanders that their stake in the community is real and imminent. Fair Elections Center and its Campus Vote Project urge swift passage of this bill. If you would like further information, please feel free to contact Michelle Kanter Cohen, Policy Director and Senior Counsel at Fair Elections Center, at mkantercohen@fairelectionscenter.org.