



TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE

SB 515 - Elections - Voter Registration Age - Alteration

POSITION: Favorable

BY: Linda Kohn, President

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The League of Women Voters of Maryland, a nonpartisan organization with 1500 members statewide, advocates for an election system that is representative and increases voter participation. That's why we support Senate Bill 515, which aligns the age young voters can register with the age they can receive their Learner's Permit. This will allow those receiving their Learner's Permit before 16 to register at that time. This will help increase the representation of younger voters and imbue them with a sense of civic responsibility.

Eligible Marylanders ages 18 to 24 have lower rates of registration and voting than any other age group. According to US Census statistics from 2022, only about 55.7% of this cohort in Maryland is registered, and only 23.5% voted¹ This has gone down since 2018, when about 60% of this cohort was registered, and 38% voted.²

It's important to sponsor efforts that expand youth participation at every access point. According to Tufts University's Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, 26% of students who didn't recall being encouraged to vote in high school agreed with the statement "Voting is a waste of time." The percentage of those who agreed dropped by half (to 12%) among young people who had been encouraged to vote in high school.³

The National Voter Registration Act (NVRA), passed federally in 1993, requires every state to offer voter registration opportunities at motor vehicle agencies.⁴ However, this missed students who received a learners permit in Maryland before the age of 16. Since there is an established precedent through programs such as Motor Voter to allow young people to register when they get their license, the same should be true of all young people receiving a learner's permit. Those who may be too young now will

¹ <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/voting-and-registration/p20-586.html>

² <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/voting-and-registration/p20-583.html>

³ <https://circle.tufts.edu/latest-research/youth-who-learned-about-voting-high-school-more-likely-become-informed-and-engaged>

⁴ <https://www.justice.gov/crt/national-voter-registration-act-1993-nvra>

be likelier to vote when they come of age since there will be more ways for them to easily register to vote.

In conclusion, the League of Women Voters urges a favorable report on SB 515.