The Institute for Responsive Government Action respectfully submits the following testimony in support of Senate Bill 515:

Senate Bill 515 would **expand opportunities for civic engagement** and electoral participation while **simultaneously saving taxpayer dollars**. It's a **win-win for government efficiency and responsiveness**. As such, the Institute for Responsive Government Action wholeheartedly supports the passage of Senate Bill 515.

Three simple facts demonstrate the importance of Senate Bill 515:

1. Under current law, Marylanders who are 16 years of age are permitted to pre-register to vote, provided they meet all other requirements for voter registration.
2. Although Marylanders can register to vote through a number of different methods, about 75% of Marylanders register to vote while applying for driver's licenses or IDs at the MVA.[1]
3. Marylanders can apply for a driver's permit when they are 15 years and 9 months old.

As a result, the current 16-year-old cutoff for pre-registration prevents tens of thousands of Marylanders (those between the ages of 15 years, 9 months and 16 years) from pre-registering to vote through the MVA — the most convenient, efficient, and secure voter registration method available in the state.

Saving Taxpayer Dollars
If these Marylanders do eventually pre-register to vote at all, they are likely to do so through **other methods that are significantly more expensive for local election officials** to administer than voter registrations submitted through the MVA.

For example, studies have shown that a paper voter registration form submitted through a high-school voter registration drive costs about $4.72 to process.[2] By contrast, voter

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[1] United States Election Assistance Commission, 2022 EAVS Data Brief: Maryland (2023).
[2] Doug Chapin & David Kuennen, The Cost (Savings) of Reform: An Analysis of Local Registration-Related Costs (2017).

registrations submitted through the MVA and transmitted electronically to election officials cost a fraction of that — as little as $.03 in some jurisdictions.[3]

Expanding Civic Engagement and Participation

Several studies show that **pre-registration increases turnout among young voters**. A national study found that pre-registration increases turnout among young voters by as much as 13%.[4] Similarly, in Florida, pre-registration increased turnout by as much as 10% among 18-year-olds in presidential elections, with particularly positive effects for young voters of color.[5]

Pre-registration also encourages long-term turnout in future elections. **Voting is habit forming, and young people who pre-register have consistently higher turnout rates over the course of several elections**.[6]

With this bill, the Maryland General Assembly has the opportunity to engage more young voters to actively participate in the democratic process. We can reinforce the idea that civic participation is a lifelong commitment, starting from an early age.

Thank you for your consideration,

Alex Tischenko
Senior Policy Advisor
Institute for Responsive Government Action

The Institute for Responsive Government Action is dedicated to ensuring state and federal governments work effectively for the very people they serve. Responsive Gov Action works to provide legislative advice and action, polling, and testimony in order to find practical policy solutions that make government systems more efficient, accessible, and responsive for everyday Americans.

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[3] *See* Washington Institute of the Study of Ethnicity and Race et al., Online Voter Registration (OLVR) Systems in Arizona and Washington: Evaluating Usage, Public Confidence and Implementation Processes (2010).

[4] John Holbein & D. Sunshine Hillygus Making Young Voters: The Impact of Preregistration on Youth Turnout. American Journal of Political Science (2015).

[5] Michael P. McDonald, Voter Preregistration Programs 24 (2009).

[6] Michael P. McDonald & Matthew Thornburg, Registering the Youth Through Voter Preregistration, 13 N.Y.U. J. LEGIS. & PUB. POL'Y 551, 568 (2010).