

Date of Hearing February 21

T. Carter Ross
Hyattsville, MD 20781

TESTIMONY ON SB 0515 - POSITION: FAVORABLE
Elections – Voter Registration Age – Alteration

TO: Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

FROM: T. Carter Ross

OPENING: My name is T. Carter Ross. I am a resident of District 22. I am submitting this testimony in support of SB 0515, an Act concerning Elections – Voter Registration Age – Alteration.

I write as a father and long-time advocate for school children. I have served on multiple committees within the City of Hyattsville and Prince George’s County Public Schools, and multiple PTAs/PTOs. That work has shown to me the value of public service, as well as the importance of encouraging people to engage with government as early and often as possible. It is a lesson I have worked to impart to my children and their peers, too.

Since 2010, Maryland has recognized the value of allowing teenagers to preregister to vote before their 18th birthday. Not only does this ease their ability to cast a ballot when eligible, it also provides opportunities to connect a simple real-world action (registering to vote) with the civics lessons they are learning in school.

Since 1988, Maryland has enabled people to register to vote through interactions with the Motor Vehicle Administration. In 2018, Maryland began automatically registering people to vote, if they were eligible and did not object, as part of getting a new driver’s license. Facilitating voter registration (and pre-registration) through the MVA makes good policy and fiscal sense, and streamlining the registration process is both efficient and convenient.

However, current rules limiting voter pre-registration to those 16 and older creates a disconnect between when teenagers can apply for a learner’s permit and when they can pre-register to vote. This bill fixes that by making the pre-registration age the same as the age at which one can seek a learner’s permit. Harmonizing these ages would allow the MVA to use the same system and process to connect learner’s permit applicants’ information with local boards of elections.

Being able to pre-register to vote has additional importance in the City of Hyattsville where I live. We are one of a least seven municipalities in Maryland that allow 16- and 17-year-olds to vote in municipal elections. In April 2022, my youngest turned 16 shortly before a special mayoral election in the city. She was able to take advantage of same-day registration to cast her first ballot, but had she been allowed to register when she got her learner's permit in January, it would have made that experience seamless.

Maryland has done a fantastic job in making sure everyone eligible to vote has a simple and readily available way to register to vote through the Moter Vehicle Administration. To ensure that all teenagers gain the same benefit, Maryland should harmonize the age for voter pre-registration with that of applying for a learner's permit. To that end, I fully support lowering the voter pre-registration age to 15 years and 9 months, and **I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report on SB 0515.**