

Institute *for* Responsive Government Action

The Institute for Responsive Government Action respectfully submits the following testimony in support of House Bill 153:

House Bill 153 would **expand opportunities for civic engagement** and electoral participation while **simultaneously saving taxpayer dollars**. It's a **win-win for government efficiency and responsiveness**.

Three simple facts demonstrate the importance of House Bill 153:

1. Marylanders can get a driver's permit when they are **15 years and 9 months old**.
2. About 75% of Marylanders register to vote while applying for driver's licenses or IDs at the MVA.¹
3. But under current law, only Marylanders who are **16 years old** are permitted to pre-register to vote.

As a result, the current 16-year-old cutoff for pre-registration prevents tens of thousands of Marylanders pre-registering to vote when they visit the MVA — denying them the most convenient, efficient, and secure voter registration method available in the state.

Saving Taxpayer Dollars

To save taxpayer dollars, we should be doing everything we can to register voters through the MVA. This is because **other methods of voter registration are much more expensive for local governments** 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, **MVA voter registration forms** transmitted electronically to election officials cost a fraction of that — **as little as \$0.03** in some jurisdictions.³

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 \(2017\)](#).

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 \(2010\)](#).

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.

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.

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).