
SB 647
Support with
Amendment

TO: The Honorable Paul G. Pinsky, Chair
Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee

FROM: Mary Clapsaddle
Director, State Affairs

DATE: February 20, 2020

On behalf of Johns Hopkins University President Ronald J. Daniels, I offer this testimony in support of **SB 647 – Election Law – Institutions of Higher Education – Voter Registration and Voting By Students (Student Voter Empowerment Act of 2020)**, with amendments.

Johns Hopkins University has made a commitment to increase voter registration and engagement rates. Building on the work of the 2018 "Hopkins Votes" initiative, the University's Center for Social Concern is working to convene university-wide collaborations to increase non-partisan voter registration among students and support every student in casting their ballot in future elections.

This initiative remains focused on voter access, regardless of political affiliation, location or voting method, or registration status. The effort began in 2018 and supported a 30 percentage point increase in the student voting rates from the 2014 mid-term election cycle.

The mission of Johns Hopkins University is to educate its students and cultivate their capacity for life-long learning, to foster independent and original research, and to bring the benefits of discovery to the world. Hopkins Votes manifests that purpose by preparing students for life-long learning through their civic engagement. Being part of the political process is imperative for all members of a community, regardless of which community they call home. Hopkins Votes hopes to encourage students to explore both national and local politics – as both are imperative for strengthening our democracy and shedding light on the issues most important to oneself.

This bill would further the goals of Hopkins Votes by ensuring that voter registration and election information is readily available to students and by physically bringing polling locations to our students.

I would note that, along with our colleagues at MICUA, we would support several clarifying amendments: limiting the requirement to establish a polling place on campus to those institutions with an *undergraduate* population of more than 4,500; specifying that a polling place will be on the *primary campus* of an institution (i.e., the JHU Homewood campus); that we will implement *additional outreach efforts* if our website links do not generate

sufficient clicks; and clarifying that while the closing of a polling location is at the discretion of the local board of election, a polling place established in accordance with this bill *may not be the sole reason* for the closure of a nearby polling place. This last provision is critical to us as a member of the central Baltimore civic community. Existing locations, such as the Waverly Library and Barclay Elementary School, are long-standing polling places that are relied upon by many members of the community beyond the boundaries of Johns Hopkins. Given that the changes to polling locations that this bill requires would take effect with the 2022 election cycle – after the upcoming Census, reapportionment, and redistricting – I trust that we will have ample time work with the Baltimore City Board of Elections to ensure that one community doesn't receive a more convenient polling location at the expense of another.

With those caveats and clarifications, Johns Hopkins urges a **favorable committee report on SB 647**.

cc: Members, Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee
Senator Clarence K. Lam