

Sophie Bertrand, Towson University, Student Ambassador with The Andrew Goodman Foundation

Testimony for SB647

Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee, Thursday Feb. 6, 2020
Election Law - Institutions of Higher Education - Voter Registration and Voting by Students (Student Voter Empowerment Act of 2020)

POSITION: FAVORABLE

My name is Sophie Bertrand, and I am the lead student Ambassador of the chapter of the Andrew Goodman Vote Everywhere program at Towson University. I've worked for the past four years on encouraging student democratic involvement and civic engagement through partnering with numerous campus organizations and seeking to enact campus change to make the democratic process more accessible for students, so this bill is of particular interest to me. I thank the Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee for the opportunity to share my story and opinions.

On my campus, students are provided with a plethora of resources about voting, and I believe that all educational institutions within the state should have this opportunity. We are afforded a voter hub on the campus website, a team of student Ambassadors dedicated to encouraging political engagement and education, a branch of the Office of Civic Engagement and Social Responsibility dedicated to political engagement, and more. Towson University also has access to polling locations on campus for both early and Election Day voting.

I believe that all of these are integral factors that contribute significantly to our voter turnout rates. The 2018 National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement reported Towson University to have surpassed voter turnout rates for other institutions by 3.1%, and voter turnout rates for the national youth population by 6.2%. Perhaps these results could be replicated by instituting similar measures on campuses throughout the state, as suggested in this legislation.

Towson University is lucky in that we have been afforded the privilege of a team on campus dedicated to providing students with resources relating to voting and political engagement. The Student Voter Empowerment Act ensures that students across the state would have the resources and information necessary to register and turn out to vote. This is exactly what is needed on college and university campuses to foster a healthy democracy within the youth population and create positive habits pertaining to civic engagement.

The passage of this bill would encourage the younger voting bloc to turnout by facilitating the formation of healthy habits of democratic engagement, thus producing youth who are more likely to become life-long voters. Additionally, the demonstrated support of officeholders and government officials would not only greatly emphasize the significance of regular democratic engagement to younger demographics, but would also indicate concern for issues young voters care about and encourage their engagement with representatives that attempt to connect with them.

Thank you again for your consideration of this legislation. I strongly urge you to give this bill a favorable report.