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Black Girls Vote, Inc.

Testimony for SB0647

Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee, Thursday, February 20, 2020

**Election Law - Institutions of Higher Education - Voter Registration and Voting by
Students**

(Student Voter Empowerment Act of 2020)

Position: Favorable

My name is Patricia Watson. I hold the position of Outreach Lead for Black Girls Vote, Inc. (BGV), a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization committed to engaging, educating, and empowering women to activate their voice by using their vote. I would like to thank the Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee for the opportunity to share why this issue is important to me. I also extend a special thank you to Senator Lam for introducing the bill and being a consistent advocate for Maryland democracy.

I am a strong believer in using the electoral process to improve the quality of life for my family and the collective community. Therefore, I urge the Senate to vote in favor of SB0647, the Student Voter Empowerment Act of 2020 (SVEA). We must do more to improve youth voter participation; this bill does exactly that. With registered voters under the age of 29 representing an increasing portion of the American electorate, the SVEA targets this demographic. The SVEA ensures that students have the resources and information necessary to register to vote and is designed to increase voter participation and turnout among students.

Maryland is home to many world class institutions of higher education and it is important that students on these campuses are able to easily engage in the democratic process. In my capacity as Outreach Lead for BGV, we aim to register as many students as possible to vote. It is for this reason that BGV currently has three collegiate chapters housed on the campuses of Morgan State University, American University, and North Carolina A&T State University.

Throughout the year, we host voter registration “pop-ups”, information panels, and fundraisers. Most notably, in September 2019, we partnered with the late Congressman Cummings to host “Women in Politics” at the Congressional Black Caucus Annual Legislative Convention.



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Additionally, our annual Black Girls Vote Ball highlights the importance of voting while honoring political trailblazers that are committed to enhancing the voice of the people.

The SVEA would assist our efforts by providing student voter education, organizational support, and transportation. These increased resources will allow students to become more aware of the issues and policies that affect them directly, while establishing a habit of voting early on. Additionally, the SVEA offers a convenient and safer option to those commuting to the polls.

Although voting is voluntary, its importance and accessibility cannot be overshadowed. It is our civic duty. Respectfully, I urge all committee members to please vote in favor of SB0647. Thank you for your time and consideration.