

To: Chair Pinsky and members of the Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee
From: Jamesha Caldwell, Education Policy Legislative Intern
Re.: **SB 647: Election Law - Institutions of Higher Education - Voter Registration and Voting by Students (Student Voter Empowerment Act of 2020)**
Date: February 20, 2020
Position: Support

As of 2018, the national average of college student voting participation has more than doubled since its previous rate of 19% in 2014¹. For institutions such as the Maryland Institute College of Art, the average college student voting participation is ten points higher than the national average of 39.1%. This is due to its participation in the Campus Democracy Challenge; a national task force aimed to increasing civic learning and engagement on college campuses². It is evident that **when college students are empowered through education, access, and representation, the likelihood of healthy civic engagement among our college students substantially increases.**

Historically, many social and political conversations surrounding the results of low voter turnout have done tremendous work in identifying, analyzing, and rectifying the consequences of disenfranchisement for many marginalized populations. But sometimes, in those very conversations of disenfranchisement, college students are underrepresented in the allocation of concrete solutions. The 2018 local and national increase in college student voting participation represents a larger and concealed narrative for many Maryland college students. At a glance, the increase represents a surging and energized group of young voters who aim to have their voices counted and represented in the ballot. However, for many other college students, the lack of fundamental resources related to voter education, polling accessibility, and civic support can cause a detrimental and dramatic flux in political representation.

SB 647 would work to ensure that the increase seen in the 2018 national and local elections would remain continuous in the state of Maryland through the implementation of voting coordinators, student voting plans, and on-campus polling in Higher Education Institutions. Through this, SB 647 would reduce the occurrence of disenfranchisement for college students while also promoting equitable access to voter education and engagement practices. For the reasons above, **ACY strongly urges a favorable report on this bill.**

¹ National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE), 2018

² MICA Voter Access Initiative Fall Summary, 2018

