

SB 283—Student and Military Voter Empowerment Act

POSITION: Support

BY: Personal Testimony of Jacquelyn Slade, Carroll County Student

DATE: February 4, 2021

Thank you to the committee and Chair Pinsky for giving me the opportunity to share why SB 283 matters to me and to Senator Elfreth for introducing the bill.

My name is Jacquelyn Slade and I am a high school senior attending St. Paul's School for Girls in Baltimore MD who will be attending Johns Hopkins University this coming fall. I also am a member of the League of Women Voters and run my own initiative, VotEd, which seeks to educate young people on how to vote and empower them to become civically engaged in government processes.

When I first voted, I felt a sense of accomplishment and pride—that my voice was finally valued by my state and country. Putting my ballot in the mailbox was one of the best moments of the hectic year of 2020. I want to ensure that every student who has the right to vote is able to feel this same sense of pride and have their voice heard in their local elections.

Although Maryland has made great strides in making voter registration convenient, not all eligible voters are aware of the procedures for registering to vote, how to obtain an absentee ballot, or the times and locations for voting. As a student who will be attending college in Maryland in the fall at Johns Hopkins University, I will be facing the dilemma of whether to continue to be registered at my home address or to change my registration to my college address. Students from different areas of the country will be facing this dilemma on a much greater scale, and will have difficulty navigating these processes.

Voting is essential to civic engagement, but many of my high school classmates are not even aware they are eligible to register to vote. I personally run an initiative at my high school, St. Paul's School for Girls, called VotEd (votedusa.com), which seeks to educate young people on voting processes and empower them to become civically engaged in our government. I have more often than not come across a classmate who doesn't know how they are able to vote, or is unaware of current events. In the process of running this initiative, I have had students ask me questions as simple as when election day even was. They were completely unaware of how the process worked. I even had a staff member approach me because she did not understand the process of early voting. With Mary PIRG, I participated in the Maryland Student Votes Conference and texted many of my friends about how to vote, and many of them were not aware that they were eligible to register at the age of 16. When I spoke about my voting initiative to my class, many of them were not aware of how our votes are even processed and counted—and admittedly I was not aware of how this process worked until I interned at the Carroll County Board of Elections this past fall. Many of these students were fully capable of succeeding in an AP US or World History class, yet they were unaware of how to actually make history by voting for who they believe represents their beliefs.

Unfortunately, many eligible Maryland voters, especially young Marylanders, are not voting. In 2018, over 72% of people between the ages of 18-24 did not vote in Maryland. Additionally, in

2018, only 54% of Marylanders aged 18-24 were registered to vote, compared to 66% of all Marylanders over the age of 18.

As an 18-year-old Carroll County resident, I found these numbers disappointing. For this reason, I established VotEd, as previously mentioned. The Maryland Senate has the opportunity to make sure the voices of young people such as myself are heard more strongly in our elections— by supporting the Student and Military Voter Empowerment Act. The Voter Empowerment Act ensures that students and members of the military have the resources and information necessary to register and turn out to vote.

The LWVMD supports SB 283 because our mission is to encourage informed and active participation in government. I, as a member of the League of Women Voters of Maryland and a student in Carroll County Maryland, respectfully request you to vote “yes” for the Student Military and Voter Empowerment Act so that students such as myself have the resources they need to make their voices heard in our elections.