

The University of Maryland Student Government Association
Testimony for SB0283
Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee, Thursday, Feb. 4, 2021
Student and Military Voter Empowerment Act
POSITION: FAVORABLE

My name is Dan Alpert and I am the Student Body President at the University of Maryland, College Park. I'd like to start by thanking Chair Pinsky and all the members of the Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee for the opportunity to share our thoughts on this important bill, as well as Senator Elfreth for introducing the legislation, which will enable hundreds of thousands of students to have the resources and knowledge to be civically engaged for years to come.

It is a fact that the habits students develop during their time in school stay with them long after graduation. Of vital importance is the lifelong habit of civic engagement, which starts by making it easier for students to be engaged while still enrolled.

At a campus as active as ours, there is no shortage of opportunities to volunteer, take action, and get involved. But when it comes to voting, college students face barriers that don't exist for other populations, resulting in a lack of access to the plethora of opportunities at hand. This bill would expand access by mandating a full-time staff member at each of our institutions who is dedicated to student voting and who will help students navigate unique complexities. Students must find time to vote, figure out how to register, decide whether to register at home or at school, and inform themselves on the candidates and ballot initiatives. Currently, these responsibilities are shared by our student government's Director of Civic Engagement and a university staff member, both of whom have responsibilities outside of the work they do for civic education. This past election cycle, we saw incredible demand from departments across campus asking for help in implementing their own voting initiatives. A full-time coordinator would significantly help by bringing together efforts from across campus, providing quick answers to voting questions, and implementing civic education in curricula across academic fields.

One of the most frequent questions posed to our team ahead of the 2020 election was how to vote in the fastest, most convenient manner. With chaotic schedules and usually no means of transportation, voting is a significant time commitment for students. While the voting process will no doubt change as a result of this past election, voting early or by mail still presents major challenges such as those I previously mentioned. A two-hour excused absence is a simple solution that opens up the opportunity for those with multiple courses, internships, and jobs to make their voice heard, and aligns students with faculty and staff who already have two hours to vote on Election Day.

If our goal is to expand access to the ballot box, then there is no better way to empower student voters than by enacting the policies prescribed in this bill. These changes further the commitment our state has to college student voter engagement and we, the Student Government Association at the University of Maryland, urge a favorable report for the Student and Military Voter Empowerment Act.

Sincerely,

Dan Alpert, *Student Body President*
Alexandra Marquez, *Director of Civic Engagement*
Ben Baitman, *Director of Government Affairs*