



TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE

HB 156 – Student and Military Voter Empowerment Act

POSITION: Support

BY: Lois Hybl & Richard Willson, Co-Presidents

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The League of Women Voters believes that democratic government depends upon informed and active citizen participation. We are concerned that voter registration and participation among younger people continues to be much lower than for older citizens. Although Maryland has made great strides in making voter registration convenient, not all who are eligible, especially college students, are aware of the procedures for registering to vote, how to obtain an absentee ballot, or the times and locations for voting.

Voting — for many college students, it may be their first time — should inspire a sense of accomplishment and pride, allowing them to see that their voices are valued by their county, state, and country. We want every student who has the right to vote to feel this way. However, the process can be challenging for college students who are away from their homes and must choose whether to register at their college address or request an absentee ballot in sufficient time to return it. A similar dilemma is faced by those in the military.

Unfortunately, many young Marylanders are not voting. In 2018, over 72% of people between the ages of 18-24 did not vote in Maryland.¹ By requiring covered higher education institutions to designate a staff member as the Student Voting Coordinator, develop a plan to increase voter registration and turnout, and provide students with convenient links to official election websites, HB 156 can ensure that lack of information will not be a barrier to registering and voting. The bill will also require collaboration between local Boards of Elections and colleges regarding the location of polling places on the campuses of colleges enrolling more than 4,500 students. In addition, it will enable military personnel to use their federal military IDs to register to vote online.

The LWVMD supports HB 156 because our mission is to encourage informed and active participation in government, and the Student Military and Voter Empowerment Act will enable these citizens to have the resources they need to make their voices heard in our elections.

¹<https://pipeline.bushcenter.org/state/maryland/voting-rates-eligible-voters-18-24/>