

Trevor Tormann & Kaitlin Quigley, LoyolaVotes - Loyola University Maryland, LoyolaVotes Student Co-Leaders

Testimony for HB0156

Ways and Means Committee, Tuesday, Jan. 26 2021 Election Law - Institutions of Higher Education - Voter Registration and Voting by Students (Student and Military Voter Empowerment Act)

POSITION: FAVORABLE

To the Members of the Ways and Means Committee,

Representing Loyola University Maryland, as the Student Co-Leaders of the university's voter education and engagement initiative, LoyolaVotes, we would like to thank the committee for allowing us the opportunity to present a testimony of our work on campus. Furthermore, we would like to thank Delegate Luedtke and Senator Elfreth for introducing HB 0156, the Student and Military Voter Empowerment Act.

As the student leaders of LoyolaVotes, we strongly urge the Maryland Senate to vote in favor of HB 0156. The Student and Military Voter Empowerment Act ensures that students have the resources and information necessary to register and turn out to vote. From the student leadership perspective, we understand how important it is to provide the right channels for civic engagement.

LoyolaVotes, established as the university's response to the ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge, began prior to our arrival at Loyola in the spring of 2018. As first-year students the following semester, we became heavily involved in the initiative and have contributed to its growth, seeing LoyolaVotes develop significantly since our earliest days. Ahead of the 2018 midterm elections, just over 100 Loyola students were signed-up with LoyolaVotes, our online voter resource platform operating in partnership with TurboVote. Exactly one year later, the number of students registered with this platform was 1,461 and it continues to grow, where at the beginning of the 2020-2021 academic year, this total rose to 1,547. We are actively bridging the gap between high registration and low turnout by connecting students with the electoral resources they need to be prepared to vote in any upcoming election.

Working in tandem with Loyola faculty, staff, and administrators, one of our roles as students is to gauge the needs and concerns of students regarding voting, in addition to addressing the roadblocks present in the process. At Loyola, we are seeing that many students are registered to vote, but they aren't actually voting— it's not necessarily that our students are apathetic, it's that

they don't know what further steps to take. Though we've come far, we have a long way to go. Implementing infrastructure like the Student and Military Voter Empowerment Act can help Loyola and other Maryland campuses continue to grow in their voter outreach efforts; these efforts include but are not limited to ensuring voter access, voter education, voter registration, and ultimately, voter turnout.

Democracy works best when we all have access and participate. 18-22 year olds are fairly new to the voting process, but this doesn't mean they should be inhibited from the polls because they weren't directed toward adequate resources. Not only is the youth vote critical, but it is also habit-forming: young people who start voting now are more likely to vote for the rest of their lives. Voting infrastructure at the college level fosters civic engagement that is not limited to a campus— rather, it helps create active citizens whose enthusiasm lasts beyond graduation.

Concludingly, we again call on the committee to vote in favor of HB 0156. There is serious potential capable of being unlocked when campuses are provided with the adequate support, funding, and relevant infrastructure - all of which are considered and ensured in the text of the Student and Military Voter Empowerment Act. The work toward establishing and sustaining a civically engaged community is being done across many Maryland college and university campuses. We implore the Maryland Senate, composed of elected representatives of the people, to vote in favor of this bill, thus, purposefully supporting student, campus, and community leaders in maintaining the strength of our democracy. Our democracy is only as strong as it is inclusive; passing this bill is one necessary step in upholding this principle.

Sincerely,

Trevor Tormann and Kaitlin Quigley