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*Legislative District 30*  
Anne Arundel County

Budget and Taxation Committee

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Joint Committee on the Chesapeake and  
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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND

ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

March 23, 2021

**Testimony in Favor of SB0283**  
**Student and Military Voter Empowerment Act**

Chairwoman Kaiser, Vice-Chair Washington, and members of the Ways and Means Committee,

I respectfully request a favorable report of Senate Bill 283, the Student and Military Voter Empowerment Act. This legislation would ensure that active duty service members and college students are able to more easily cast their ballots as well as ensure that anyone living in large residential institutions, such as senior living facilities and military installations, are properly incorporated into the discussion of precinct boundary decisions by the State Board of Elections (SBE).

**For college students:** this legislation will require institutions to designate a staff person as a “student voting coordinator” and require that coordinator to develop and implement a student voting plan to expand civic engagement. This student voting plan will have critical information on how a student can cast their ballot. Lastly, there will be reporting measures in place to ensure that institutions are doing as much as possible to expand voting access to college students.

According to Tufts University, only 48% of college students voted in the 2016 election, a significantly lower rate than the 61% national average for all Americans. In the 2014 midterm election, only 13% of college students ages 18-24 voted. While voting rates increased in the 2018 midterm election, to 40%, that rate was still 10 percentage points lower than the average for all Americans. This Committee knows that voting is also habit-forming: people who vote at early ages develop the lifelong habit of voting. It is critical that this body create policies to increase voter participation, and thus a habit of lifelong voting, in young Marylanders.

**For active duty service members:** this legislation will make two primary policy changes: first, the bill requires SBE to develop a process for the electronic submission of the Federal Post Card Application (FPCA); second, the bill allows the active duty service member to use their federally issued common access card to be used to sign the electronic application. The FPCA is the form that service members must mail to SBE in order to apply for and receive an absentee ballot to vote, and in creating a process that allows for this form to be digitally submitted we would allow for more men and women serving to request their ballot when they otherwise would not be able to because of lack of mailing services or timing. These important policy recommendations came at the suggestion of Delegate Mike Griffith.

**For those living in large residential institutions:** this legislation requires that local election boards seek and obtain input from large residential institutions when undergoing the process of determining precinct

boundaries and determining the locations of polling sites. In doing this we will ensure that the residents of these facilities have a voice at the table and are a part of the process -- in turn the residents of these facilities will have a better ability to vote. This policy change is a balanced approach to legislation this Committee heard last year.

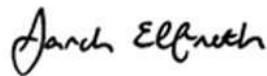
I would be remiss if I did not mention that this bill almost makes my career feel as though it has come full circle. Fourteen years ago I came to this Committee as a college student and member of the Student Government at Towson University to testify on a bill that would have increased access for students to vote. It's a story I tell on the campaign trail and - frankly - is a little more colorful than I am comfortable sharing before this Committee. But the gist of it is that participation - whether voting or testifying before this very Committee - is an important life value and practice that we should work to instill in all citizens, particularly young people. In my case, it turned out pretty well.

This legislation is a cross-file of legislation that passed this Committee and House earlier this legislative session. This version of the bill is in a slightly different form than the version passed by this Committee. Specifically the Senate amendments:

1. Describe what some of the reasonable accommodations and collaborations with Local Election Boards are as it pertains to the student voting plan;
2. Remove the requirement for the 2-hour excused absence for students to vote, and;
3. Clarify that the student voting plan may disseminate information regarding how a student should vote or who a student should vote for.

With the aforementioned amendments, Senate Bill 283 passed the Senate unanimously and I would respectfully request a favorable report.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sarah Elfreth".

Sarah Elfreth