

Delanie Blubaugh, Frostburg State University Student Government Association, Student Affairs Committee Chair; University System of Maryland Civic Engagement Student Leadership Committee, Co-Chair

Testimony for HB0156 Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee, Tuesday, Jan. 26, 2021 Election Law - Institutions of Higher Education - Voter Registration and Voting by Students (Student and Military Voter Empowerment Act of 2021)

POSITION: Favorable

I am Delanie Blubaugh, a junior Political Science and Legal Studies double major at Frostburg State University. In addition to my studies, I serve as the Student Affairs Committee Chair for FSU's Student Government Association, Editor in Chief of The Bottom Line, FSU's independent student newspaper, and Co-Chair of the University System of Maryland Civic Engagement Student Leadership Committee.

Thank you to the committee for the opportunity to share my thoughts on this issue, and why I think this bill is a necessary step for achieving voter equity for students across the state, as well as our Maryland military men and women. Additionally, thank you to Delegate Luedtke and Senator Elfreth for introducing this bill during this legislative session.

The Student and Military Voter Empowerment Act of 2021 is a comprehensive effort to provide Maryland students and military personnel with resources, information, and avenues for participating and being engaged civically. It is imperative to proper, free, and fair democratic practices that students and men and women in the military across the state have convenient avenues for registering to vote, as well as having easy access to resources that help them to participate civically.

In my role as Co-Chair of the University System of Maryland Civic Engagement Student Leadership Committee, I saw students across the state initiating civic engagement-oriented seminars, activities, and events that educated their peers and instilled in so many of them the importance of a lifelong dedication to their civic duty. However, I also saw and experienced firsthand how challenging it was for students across the state to initiate these practices and instill civic responsibility in their peers without state policies that supported their mission.

I am lucky to have grown up in a family where civic duty and responsibility were significant core values. However, many students and young people who turned 18, or were able to vote for the first time, in 2020 may not have been so lucky to be familiar with civic duty and the procedures they must follow to cast their ballots. Coupled with the significant changes made to mail-in voting and other procedures as a result of the pandemic, this bill could not come at a more important and reflective time.

An important aspect of this bill requires local Boards of Elections to include and consult large residential institutional communities in the decision to select polling locations. Even in my small

community of Frostburg, Maryland, many FSU students lack the transportation to get them to and from their polling place. By requiring local Boards of Elections to consult with these communities, students at Frostburg State would have a seat at the table in determining a polling location that fits their needs.

The passage of HB0156 is an imperative bill that seeks to improve inequities regarding student and military voting and civic engagement. In a time where so many inequities have come to light and been emboldened by the COVID-19 pandemic, this bill comes at just the right time.

The Student and Military Voter Empowerment Act of 2021 is necessary legislation to provide students and military personnel the proper channels to exercise their right to vote and become more engaged civically.

I am very much in support of this essential legislation, and urge all on the committee to support it as well.

Thank you.