



**Testimony to the Ways and Means Committee
HB156: Student and Military Voter Empowerment Act
Position: Favorable**

Tuesday, January 26, 2021

Ways and Means Committee
Room 131
6 Bladen St.,
Annapolis, MD 21401

Honorable Chair Anne Kaiser and Members of the Committee:

My name is Paige Trzaskawka and I am a sophomore at Towson University, I am currently studying political science and communication studies with a minor in German. I also serve as the Director of Legislative Affairs for the Towson University Student Government Association. As Director of Legislative Affairs I have worked with The Office of Civic Engagement & Social Responsibility, as well as various other Student Government Association members, at Towson University to acknowledge issues that block students from voting. Specifically, Towson University has no policies in place pertaining to excused absences from classes when exercising this right. Because of this specific barrier we are in full support of this bill, we are fortunate enough to have some sections of this bill relatively covered in terms of accessible information and polling locations on and around campus. However, we also acknowledge that there are many higher education institutions that do not have these opportunities or resources in place. We feel it is part of our civic duty to support them, as well as the Towson University community, in rising toward increased student voter turnout.

Before I came to Towson I grew up in Medford, New Jersey. Since I was young my parents taught me the importance of being involved in my community and reinforced the idea that I had a unique opportunity living in the United States. This is one of the reasons why I was motivated to join the SGA at Towson University and to be an active member of the student community. I became interested in this bill largely because I believe we should make every effort to increase voter participation, by making both voter registration and the act of voting simple and accessible. Especially to young adults that are soon to enter the workforce. Registering to vote is half of the equation, putting that registration to use through the act of voting is the other half. This bill provides intense and necessary support for both halves, effectively allowing the democratic system to work for young adults. As a student and a leader within the Towson University community, I have seen the dismay students across the state



have with being unable to vote due to a lack of registration knowledge and/or lack of time to physically get out and vote. I believe that this bill could ease those worries and increase student civic engagement as a whole.

I want to bring this belief into reality, both here at Towson University and at all other Universities in the state. Towson University has already added a polling station and it has helped to significantly increase voter turnout within the student population. According to the National Study of Learning, Voting and Environment (NSLVE) 42.2% of TU students voted in the 2018 midterm elections. This is a significant increase in student voter participation compared to the 2014 midterm election in which only 20.7% of the students voted. We anticipate that with increased support these numbers will only continue to rise.

Voting serves as a building block to more active involvement in civic life. Numerous studies have shown that voting is habit-forming, and young people that vote early on are more likely to become life-long voters. Universities serve to prepare us for life in the real world, this is why we should reinforce the importance of voting to students. So they can keep these habits for life.

I want to thank Delegates Luedtke and Griffith for their hard work and careful thought they put into this bill. As a student, it means the world to know our concerns are being considered and addressed through legislation like this. Our state can, and should, take this opportunity to step up and be a national leader on solving issues that lie in our democracy. We can assist students all over the state to become registered and active voters by supporting this Act, and in turn remove barriers that have such a direct impact on our student civic engagement.

For all these reasons, we support HB156 and urge a favorable report.

Best regards,

Paige Trzaskawka
SGA Director of Legislative Affairs 2020-2021