

March 23, 2021

Testimony on SB 283
Election Law - Institutions of Higher Education - Voter Registration and Voting by Students (Student & Military
Voter Empowerment Act of 2021)
Ways and Means

Position: Favorable

Common Cause Maryland supports SB 283 which aims to increase access to voter information and the overall participation of students by establishing campus vote coordinators who work to develop campus voter education plans in collaboration with students, ensuring campuses have voter information readily available on their websites, and providing institutions of higher education the opportunity to provide input to local boards of elections as they select polling locations.

Institutions of Higher Education play a critical role in creating lifelong voters and civic leaders. For most students, their first experience voting or getting involved in civic life happens during their time at a college or university. These institutions are well positioned to not only encourage eligible students to vote, but also help them navigate the process of voting and understanding the information on their ballots.

For many students going to college is their first time stepping out into the real world and gaining independence. Some are far from home and loved ones but are still trying to build a life where they can be informed citizens with a stable future. They may not be aware of what a polling location is or even how to cast a vote. This is especially true for many immigrant students, new voters and Americans, who make up a large portion of college campuses.

Upon graduation from an institution of higher education, students are expected to be properly informed, active participants in our democracy. Contrary to this, many students remain unaware of certain aspects of the voting process and in turn graduate without ever learning such knowledge. With this in mind, Institutions of higher education throughout the state should be doing all that they can to encourage voter participation on their campus communities. SB 283 provides them with straightforward opportunities to do so.

With the Implementation of this bill, students will now have the support of faculty and staff when navigating the election process. SB 283 will promote the need for collaboration between election officials, student organizations and college campuses. This collaboration will ensure that students from Historically Black Colleges and Universities where overall participation is declining and other Institutions are properly Informed and educated on all aspects of the voting process.

We have the opportunity today to make a change for the young people In Maryland. Our actions will ensure that that students today and, in the future, will never be confused about voting. Voter participation will increase when we make it our mission to educate the youth. College campuses open each day to educate our students on complex laws, mathematical equations and complex theories, it should not be a hassle then to educate students on our democracy and the methods to contribute to it working effectively.

We urge a favorable report.