

**TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE**

**SB 283 – Student and Military Voter Empowerment Act**

**POSITION: Favorable**

**BY: Lois Hybl & Richard Willson, Co-Presidents**

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The League of Women Voters believes that democratic government depends upon informed and active citizen participation, but voter registration and participation among younger people continues to be much lower than for older groups. In 2018, over 72% of people between the ages of 18-24 did not vote in Maryland.<sup>1</sup> Although Maryland has made great strides in making voter registration convenient, not all who are eligible, especially college students, are aware of the procedures for registering to vote, how to obtain an absentee ballot, or the times and locations for voting.

Voting — for many college students, possibly for the first time — should inspire a sense of accomplishment and pride, allowing them to see that their voices are valued by their county, state, and country. We want everyone who has the right to vote to feel this way. However, the process can be challenging for college students who are away from their homes and must choose whether to register at their college address or request an absentee ballot in sufficient time to return it. A similar dilemma is faced by those in the military.

By requiring covered higher education institutions to designate a staff member as the Student Voting Coordinator, develop a plan to increase voter registration and turnout, and provide students with convenient links to official election websites, SB 283 can ensure that lack of information will not be a barrier to registering and voting. The bill will also require local Boards of Elections to get input from large residential colleges, military installations, and retirement and senior care communities when establishing precinct boundaries and polling place locations. In addition, the bill will enable military personnel to use their Common Access Card to facilitate registering online and requesting an absentee ballot.

The LWVMD supports SB 283 because our mission is to encourage informed and active participation in government, and the Student Military and Voter Empowerment Act will enable these citizens to have the resources they need to make their voices heard in our elections.

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<sup>1</sup><https://pipeline.bushcenter.org/state/maryland/voting-rates-eligible-voters-18-24/>