

Ms. Adrienne Johnson - Testimony in Favor
SB 605 – Election Law – Citizens Who Live Overseas - Right to Vote
Senate Education, Energy& Environment Committee Hearing: March 14, 2023

Chair Feldman and members of the committee,

My name is Adrienne Johnson, and I am a Montgomery County voter living in the United Kingdom. Thank you for allowing me to voice my support for Senate Bill 605, the bill that would enfranchise and authorize American overseas voters to register and vote for candidates running for federal, state, and local races in the county where they last resided.

In a global economy, it is increasingly common for American citizens to live, study, and work abroad. I moved to the UK following a workplace promotion. Nevertheless, I remain proud to be a product of Montgomery County, Maryland. More importantly, I have retained deep ties to the community where I grew up, one that was also home to numerous civil servants employed across all agencies, indeed, across all levels of public service. This left a lasting impression on me. I learned the importance and power of civic engagement at an early age. Since moving abroad, I have continued to vote regularly, and am active in American politics.

Access to the ballot is a cornerstone of democracy. My family's history in Montgomery County goes back 4 generations in the Sandy Spring area, where most Quakers freed their slaves by 1820, thus creating a sizeable community of free Black Americans. The well-being of my relatives, including an elderly parent, aunts, uncles, and cousins, who still reside in the county is directly tied to decisions made by elected officials at State and local levels. This, in turn, has a direct impact on me, as the possibility of a return is ever-present and completely plausible. Whether public health-related, estate / asset-related, or otherwise, living abroad does not shield me or other Marylanders who reside abroad from the impact of legislation made by Maryland's locally elected officials, yet I have no say in electing those who make such decisions. Access to the ballot is a right of American citizenship. The power of my vote should extend beyond my federally protected right to vote for candidates running for federal office. At present, someone who only recently became a Maryland resident has more voting power than I, who has strong, and lasting ties to my home community. This is undemocratic.

The nations' big issues generally mirror local big issues. I believe the passing of SB 605 will encourage greater voter engagement by providing overseas Marylanders the broadest power of their vote. I feel it is my right and obligation to have a voice in deciding who rises through the ranks of leadership. I consider it my civic duty and I believe expanding the pool of eligible voters will contribute to a more representative pool of candidates.

Thank you to Senator Lewis Young for introducing SB 605.

I thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Ms. Adrienne Johnson

Montgomery County Voter in the United Kingdom