



Maryland Youth Advisory Council  
c/o Governor's Office of Crime  
Prevention, Youth, and Victim Services  
100 Community Place,  
Crownsville, MD 21032

Grace Minakowski, *Chair*  
Will O'Donnell, *Vice-Chair*  
Folashade Epebinu, *Secretary*

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February 6, 2024

**Re: HB 436** | Election Law - Voter Registration - Age and Notification to Minors

Dear Chair Atterbeary and Members of the Ways and Means Committee,

The Maryland Youth Advisory Council prides itself on being a coalition of diverse young advocates and leaders who serve as a voice for youth in the state of Maryland. As leaders in our communities, and as appointees of the Governor, President of the Senate, Speaker of the House, Maryland Association of Student Councils, Maryland Higher Education Commission and the University System of Maryland, we take every opportunity to address relevant issues by influencing legislation, spreading public awareness and serving as a liaison between youth and policymakers regarding issues facing youth.

**HB 436** reflects the growing progress towards engaging youth civically and giving them the autonomy to vote in local Maryland elections. Participating in the election process is an important and valuable experience, one that *needs* to be provided to young Marylanders. History tells us that when given the opportunity to become civically engaged, youth jump at the opportunity; in 2020, more than half of registered voters aged 18-24 voted in the presidential election.<sup>1</sup> While Maryland has made great progress with involving youth in the elections process, lowering the voting registration age is a critical next step. **HB 436** alters the voting registration age to 15 and nine months, the same time when young Marylanders receive their provisional driving licenses and begin thinking about their life after education; if our youth can become drivers and plan their future at 15 and nine months, they should also be able to vote for that future. Though youth turnout has continued to grow in the 21st century, the turnout of Maryland voters of all ages has remained low. In fact, in 2018 only 54% of eligible Marylanders voted in the State's midterm election.<sup>2</sup>

**HB 436** not only targets youth engagement, but also provides necessary and valuable information for Maryland voters of all ages. Specifically, **HB 436** provides higher engagement by lowering the voter registration age from 16 years to 15 years and 9 months, and addresses the lack of information provided to eligible voters, encouraging voter turnout.

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<sup>1</sup> "Young Adults Ages 18 to 24 Who Voted in the Last Presidential Election | KIDS COUNT Data Center." 2021. [datacenter.aecf.org](https://datacenter.aecf.org). The Annie E. Casey Foundation. August 2021.

<https://datacenter.aecf.org/data/tables/11204-young-adults-ages-18-to-24-who-voted-in-the-last-presidential-election#detailed/1/any/false/574>.

<sup>2</sup> "Maryland Sees Just under 55 Percent Voter Turnout in Midterms - CBS Baltimore." 2018.

[www.cbsnews.com](http://www.cbsnews.com). CBS News. November 7, 2018.

<https://www.cbsnews.com/baltimore/news/maryland-sees-just-under-55-percent-voter-turnout-in-midterms/>.



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This legislation not only emphasizes the critical importance of youth in the democratic process, but also provides a better equipped knowledge base to Maryland citizens unsure about election procedures. The Council has voted in favor of endorsing **HB 436**, as it aligns with the Council's Legislative Platform supporting:

- a. Providing outlets and opportunities for youth to speak out about issues affecting them (Article I. Youth Representation; Clause E) and;
- b. Opportunities for youth inclusion within local and statewide decisions (Article I. Youth Representation; Clause F)

**HB 436** moves to protect the civic rights of young Marylanders and ensure *all* voices are equally valued in the legislative process, through the elimination of barriers to voting across Maryland, as a whole. The Council believes it the duty of the Maryland General Assembly to pass legislation which will cultivate, engage, and educate the youth of our, and future, generations. For these reasons, the Council supports **HB 436** and respectfully requests a favorable report from the committee. We thank you for your consideration of our position.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "G. Minakowski", written in a cursive style.

Grace Minakowski, Chair  
Maryland Youth Advisory Council