

HOUSE BILL 373 Election Law – Voting Age – Board of Education Elections

Chairman, Vice Chairman, and distinguished members of the Committee,

As a mother, teacher, and voting rights activist, I support the proposal to lower the voting age for nonpartisan Board of Education elections across Maryland. By allowing students a voice in elections that affect their schooling, we foster early habits of participation, affirming their capacity to contribute to our democracy and enhancing the educational system that shapes their futures.

Allowing young Marylanders to participate in Board of Education elections acknowledges their direct stake in the education system. These students, our children, live daily with the outcomes of the decisions made at this level. They experience firsthand the implications of policies on curriculum, school safety, and resource allocation. By enabling them to vote, we recognize their unique insights and affirm their role in shaping the educational landscape that directly impacts their lives and futures.

Moreover, this proposal aligns with the foundational goal of our public education system: to prepare students not just academically, but as informed, engaged citizens. Participation in Board of Education elections provides a practical application of civics education, reinforcing the values of responsibility, participation, and community involvement. It's an opportunity to instill in young people the habit of voting and the understanding of its importance in a democratic society, potentially increasing lifetime voter participation rates.

Critically, engaging young people in the electoral process can lead to a more vibrant, dynamic political culture that is responsive to the needs and aspirations of younger generations. Research suggests that voting is habit-forming; individuals who vote in one election are significantly more likely to do so in future elections. By

lowering the voting age for Board of Education elections, we can help cultivate a more engaged and participatory citizenry for the long term.

In conclusion, this proposal is a testament to our shared values of democracy, education, and civic duty. It is a recognition of the capacity of our young people to contribute meaningfully to the discussions and decisions that affect their education and their lives. I urge the committee to consider the profound impact that empowering young voters could have on our community and our democracy. Let us take this step towards inclusivity, empowerment, and the strengthening of our democratic principles by supporting the initiative to lower the voting age for nonpartisan Board of Education elections in Maryland.

I respectfully urge you to report favorably on HB 373.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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