



The Honorable Vanessa E. Atterbeary
House Committee on Ways and Means
Maryland House of Delegates
6 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

Honorable Vanessa E. Atterbeary and Members of the House Ways & Means Committee,

I am respectfully writing to express my strong support for HB 52, the "Your School, Your Voice" Act, introduced by Delegate Joe Vogel, which would grant counties the decision-making authority to lower the voting age to 16 for local School Boards of Education elections. This important measure would empower Maryland's young people, ensure that educational policies reflect the needs of students, and strengthen civic engagement in the state of Maryland.

Research demonstrates that 16- and 17-year-olds are not only capable of participating in elections, but they are also highly motivated to do so. A [2020 study](#) from Tufts University's CIRCLE found that 16- and 17-year-olds exhibit political awareness comparable to older voters, and they are eager to engage in the democratic process when provided the opportunity. Furthermore, countries like Austria and Scotland, which have lowered the voting age, [report positive outcomes](#), including high voter turnout and sustained engagement in subsequent elections.

Locally, Takoma Park has successfully allowed 16-year-olds to vote in municipal elections since 2013, with [participation rates surpassing 75%](#). Maryland is no stranger to innovation in local governance. In the past 13 years, 8 cities in the state have extended voting rights to 16- and 17-year-olds. Takoma Park's experience provides compelling evidence of success: in the first election after the change, turnout among 16- and 17-year-olds exceeded that of any other age group. Since then, similar initiatives in California, New Jersey, Vermont, and even 22 countries including Austria and Argentina have demonstrated that engaging younger voters builds a more representative, participatory democracy. This experience underscores the capacity and ability of young voters to contribute meaningfully to civic life.

The "Your School, Your Voice" Act offers a unique opportunity to directly involve students in decisions that affect their education, such as curriculum, school safety, and funding priorities. By lowering the voting age in local school board elections, Maryland would create an inclusive democratic process that values the voices of young people. This legislation will foster a culture of civic responsibility and help ensure that our future leaders are engaged and informed from an early age.

I urge the Committee to support HB 52 and take this important step toward enhancing youth civic participation in Maryland. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
LaJuan Allen
Director, Vote16USA