

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

Honorable Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the House Ways & Means Committee,

My name is Arianna Raney, and I am a student at Winston Churchill High School in Montgomery County. I am writing to express my strong support for the “Your School, Your Voice” Act, HB0052, introduced by Delegate Vogel. This bill would enable counties to allow 16-year-olds to vote in Board of Education elections. I firmly believe that this bill would benefit Maryland students by providing them with a voice in their school systems and fostering lifelong civic engagement.

As a student in Montgomery County, I’ve witnessed how Maryland values youth voices. Maryland has two counties, including Montgomery, where a Student Member of the Board (SMOB) holds full voting rights. I remember the first time I voted for the SMOB in sixth grade. I was amazed that 12-year-olds like myself had a role in shaping our school system, and this experience inspired me to become more engaged as a student. That vote marked a turning point, sparking my passion for involvement in our education system.

While thousands of students in Maryland already have some say in their Board of Education through their SMOBs, the “Your School, Your Voice” Act would provide older students the right to elect all of the representatives who directly impact their lives. The members of the Board of Education make critical decisions that directly shape our daily experiences as students, from curriculum choices to school safety policies, mental health resources, and budget allocations. These are not abstract concepts to us—they are the very realities we face every day in the classroom, on the sports field, and in our extracurricular activities. Despite this, students currently have no formal say in electing the majority of Board members who determine these policies. How can we ensure our elected officials are truly representing us when we, the subjects of their decisions, cannot vote? Allowing 16-year-olds to vote in Board of Education elections ensures that the individuals making decisions about our education are held accountable to those who are most impacted: the students.

In my AP Government class, we learned that early voting experiences lead to lifelong civic engagement, a fact that has really resonated with me in my support of this bill. In fact, evidence from Scotland suggests that individuals who vote in their first eligible elections are [significantly more likely to continue voting](#) throughout their lives. In recent years, various governments have lowered the voting age to 16. Among them is Maryland’s own city of Takoma Park, where a

record [69% of under 18 voters voted in the 2020 election](#). By enabling 16-year-olds to participate in Board of Education elections, Maryland would be empowering its youth to establish voting as a habit. This bill is an opportunity to create generations of informed, active participants in democracy who are equipped with firsthand experience in making their voices heard.

Additionally, it is worth noting that 16-year-olds are already entrusted with significant responsibilities. Many of us drive, work part-time jobs, and therefore pay taxes. Voting in Board of Education elections is a natural extension of these responsibilities, giving us a say in the policies that affect our education and future opportunities. From a developmental standpoint, an [NIH Study](#) concluded that 16- and 17-year-olds do, in fact, possess the developmental capacity necessary to vote meaningfully. As they aptly explain, “Democracy can be strengthened by expanding voting rights to younger citizens and allowing youth to participate in decisions that affect their lives and futures. Voting can benefit adolescents’ civic development over time, which also benefits democracy, including establishing long-term voting habits and increasing political interest, knowledge, and other civic commitments ([Hart & Youniss, 2018](#); [Hooghe & Wilkenfeld, 2008](#)). Unfortunately, voting policy decisions are not often made in consultation with scientific evidence, and even less often consider a developmental science perspective.... Our study contributes more evidence of young people’s capacities to vote and highlights the urgent need to take adolescents and their views seriously” (Source: [Adolescents Provide More Complex Reasons for Lowering the Voting Age Than Do Adults: Evidence From National Convenience Samples](#)).

The “Your School, Your Voice” Act is not just a policy change—it is a statement of trust in Maryland’s students and their ability to contribute meaningfully to their communities. By passing this bill, you would be sending a powerful message that Maryland values and empowers its youth to have a voice in shaping their education and their futures.

Thank you for your time and for considering this critical step toward greater youth engagement and representation. I urge you to vote in favor of the “Your School, Your Voice” Act. I urge you to consider the long-term benefits, the scientific findings, and the students of Maryland. And most of all, I urge you to provide us with the opportunity to make a difference in our school systems.

Sincerely,  
Arianna Raney  
Student, Winston Churchill High School