

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

Chair Atterbeary, Vice Chair Wilkins, and the members of the Committee,

My name is Vanessa Li, and I am a high school student in St. Mary's County. I serve as a youth representative for Generation Citizen's Vote16USA National Youth Advisory Board and as the Director and Co-Founder of Vote16MD, a statewide coalition working to lower the voting age to 16 in Maryland's municipal and countywide elections. I am writing in favor of House Bill 0052, the "Your School, Your Voice Act".

This legislation represents an opportunity to recognize the value and capability of young people in shaping their communities. Too often, youth are excluded from the voting process despite having the knowledge to contribute meaningful perspectives. Expanding youth voting rights not only fosters civic responsibility but also ensures that future generations are more engaged in creating a democracy that represents their needs.

Research by FairVote shows that introducing voting at 16 can establish lifelong voting habits: The earlier voters cast their first ballot, the more likely they are to develop habitual voting patterns. By empowering 16 and 17-year-olds to participate in local elections, we encourage early civic involvement, leading to a more active and engaged electorate in the long term.

In fact, lowering the voting age to 16 has been successfully implemented in various jurisdictions. In Maryland, seven cities, like Takoma Park and Hyattsville, have extended voting rights to 16—and 17-year-olds for local elections, setting a strong precedent for Maryland to expand the reform statewide to local school boards - where students are the most impacted.

This bill is a progressive step toward a more inclusive and representative democracy. It empowers young citizens, fosters lifelong civic engagement, and ensures that local policies reflect the diverse voices within our schools. I urge the Committee to support HB0052 in encouraging and extending youth civic participation in Maryland. Thank you for your consideration!

Sincerely,
Vanessa Li
Vote16MD Director
Vote16USA Youth Advisory Board